SWEETHEART GWEN

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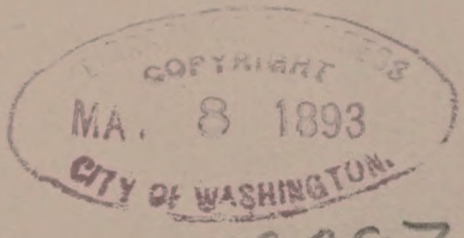
A WELSH IDYLL

BY

WILLIAM TIREBUCK

AUTHOR OF "DORRIE," "ST. MARGARET," ETC.



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TO

My Sister Margaret,

THE CRITIC ON THE HEARTH.

CONTENTS.

PART I.

PART II.

PART III.

PART I.

SWEETHEART GWEN.

CHAPTER I.

A CHANGE OF AIR.

When Mark was about five—5 A.M. in the morning of life—he was sent from Liverpool to his grandmother's farm, Bryn Nant, in the verdant Vale of Clwyd in North Wales. He arrived at the Foryd, the landing place for passengers by the Rhyl Packet, at night, and was transferred to the enthusiastic care of his bonny Auntie Bet. There was a springless cart in waiting, and in view of five miles of uneven roads, for Mark's comfort the old cart was upholstered with straw, sacks—and his Auntie Bet. She herself sat packed in straw with her back against the tail-board, and was

like an automatic bed-chair that could cast its shawled arms around Mark and lock him in a nest of warmth. On the journey, the head of the chair sometimes leaned over Mark and asked him if he felt warm and cooed Welsh croonings of endearment so near his ear that the buzzing vibrating voice tickled him.

On the front of the cart, guiding the horse Boxor between the hedges and ditches, now under the gloom of oaks and now by the yielding pillars of poplars, was Bet's brother David, known as Darve. Boxor several times gave a start and made off at a heavy jolting agricultural trot, upsetting Bet and Mark out of their coziness, and allowing the night air to creep in between the gaps in the shawl.

Once Boxor jolted too much, and Darve rose from his seat and balancing himself with his foot on the shaft, he whirled the spare end of the reins in the air and swooped it under Boxor's flank to a growling accompa-

niment of forcible Welsh. Off Boxor went at a heavy-hoofed gallop. Darve was thrown back on his seat, and passionately muttering that *he* would put the brute through its pacings if it shewed any of its pranks, he rose to lash Boxor again.

"Doan't!* Darve, lad," called sister Bet in rather weak English, but with a marked and melodious Welsh accent. "Boxor is only wish for home. 'Tis late out of bed for him. Doan't, doan't lad! . . . . Wo Boxor; good Boxor. Wo my beauty," she said soothingly to the galloping horse, as if through Darve's back.

"I'll beauty him! I'll give him wish for home!"—and Darve lashed at him again.

"Well *doan't!*—you are hard-hearted on the thing; and see, you fright Mark here, to

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* The mongrel English in *Sweetheart Gwen* is given as mongrel German or French, or as any English dialect, might be given.

cry. Never mind, Mark, my boy—Uncle Darve is not hurt the horse. Well now, doan't David man, or I come and drive myself!"

"Drive deevil!" said Darve.

"Well yes indeed, drive *you!*" replied Bet, just as one wheel of the cart sank in the soft rim of a ditch, while the thick low branches of a spreading oak almost swept Darve off his seat into the body of the cart; and all came to a stand. "Serve you well!" cried Bet good-humouredly, laughing under the rustling leaves of the drooping branches; and Darve could not help but laugh too. "Serve you well. You have lash for lash. Mark! you are right? You have no hurts? Well done! This *is* fun for to tell Nain! (Grandmother.)"

Darve still laughing groped his way over the side of the cart, went up to Boxor, patted its neck, examined its limbs, and paid a visit

of inspection to the wheel half down the ditch.

"Bet, you will have to mount out," he called.

"No indeed;—Bet and Mark will not," was the muffled reply under the branches.

"Well—*yes*."

"Well—*no*. I am comfortable warm here;—beside I must come through a wood and scratch my face, and Mark's, for *you*. No indeed. Take you Boxor by the head to the road, lad, and he pull us in quicksticks."

"But the wheel is half spokes in the ditch, woman."

"Well, get it half spokes out, man, and it will be right; and we are near Blue Hand Inn, as good as home in few minutes."

"Oh, diawl (Devil)!" grumbled Darve going to Boxor's head. "Come out of this you fooled-foot of a thing," he said twitching the rein, and Boxor in about four moves had

the cart in the middle of the road again, leaving the rustling branches swaying to and fro in the darkness.

Darve did not mount his seat again, but walked by Boxor's head, and in a short time the cart with its final rolls and jolts passed from a dark road into a darker farm yard.

CHAPTER II.

BRYN-NANT.

THE transition from the road to the farm yard was like passing from dusk into night, and yet out of the night came the sweet smell of a shippon, occasional wafts of smoke from a fire of wood, and the friendly bark of a dog. Two dimly-lighted windows became visible, then an opened door gaped with light on the darkness, and a tall old woman with her head in a shawl came out of the doorway light and stood in the dark with the erratic flash of a lantern about her.

"Have you got him, Bet?" the old woman eagerly asked in Welsh, holding the lantern towards the cart.

"Yes, mother."

"Let me have him then. Quick! Come

to Nain, Mark, my boy. Come to Nain!" she said putting down the lantern and holding out her arms. Mark was handed to her. "And how are you, my boy?" she said kissing him on one cheek. "My own Mareea's (Maria's) own boy! How *are* you?" she repeated, kissing him on the other cheek. "Cold and tired are you? That naughty old cart shaking my Mark! Come in, come in. Come Bet, my girl, doan't stay in the night out there. Darve will see Boxor to right."

Nain and Mark passed from the chilly darkness into the warmth of a small kitchen where a little table was laid with milk and dark bread, and butter, opposite an open fireplace. The wood fire flared a brightness along the rafters of the whitewashed ceiling where sage and other herbs, old horse-shoes and bits, reserves of bacon, and even Nain's Sunday boots, were hung.

Nain quickly guided Mark between the

shining black oak settle and the table, to the fire. She put on another log of wood, disturbed the grey silent ashes, and sitting on a chair she took the boy on her knee. Off went his cap; off went his little coat; off his shoes and stockings, and giving the fire another poke until the new block sent up a triumphal blaze, Nain toasted her hand at the fire and rubbed Mark's plump little legs and feet into a most comfortable warmth.

Whenever she looked at Mark or asked him questions (which he never answered) there came a smiling light in the bright gipsy black eyes, a smiling curve along the lips, and smiling warm tints to her olive cheeks. Once as she gazed at Mark's brown hair, brown eyes and chubby features, she suddenly kissed the boy and before lifting her head again she pressed her eyelids on one of the ends of her dark little Welsh wool shoulder shawl.

When Bet had closed the door and taken off her things she also approached the fire, kneeling on the great iron fender to warm herself and to look at Mark. She looked at him several times, her eyes returning after each look, to gaze into the fire. Looking at him again, however, she at last said :

" Well, dear me, Mam anwyl (Mother dear) isn't this boy like—poor Iwan ?"

" The more I look at him, Bet ! He's the very—" Nain shook her head in speechless pain, and nodded it up and down.

" How *is* our Iwan ?" asked Bet, turning to the fire, almost afraid to hear about her invalid brother.

" Ill, ill, girl ; very ill. Bad as bad can be."

Bet half rose, and Nain said, " Doan't you go to him yet, my girl. Gwen is come this afternoon and is with him. I am think of your clothes from the night's air. They would give chill to his room, and he is so ten-

der with his breath. Warm yourself first, Bet. Aye, aye, bad ;—poor lad !"

Bet moved still closer to the fire, warming her hands, her sleeves, and her skirt. She glanced once more at Mark. The same sort of tears that had suffused her Mother's eyes, slowly suffused hers, and in a pain that was only half conquered, Bet threw her arms around Mark and kissed him. "The very look, Mother," she said, as the lifted latch of the door was heard.

It was Darve. Bet slyly dried her eyes, and Nain forced herself to look cheerful.

"Here's Uncle Davith !" said Nain exultingly to Mark. "Let Davith come to the fire, Bet"—and Bet rose from the fender and took a chair on the right. Darve took off his cap and his coat and came to the corner of the settle on the left.

"Well, Mark lad, are you warrm ?" he asked as he stooped to unlace his heavy boots, and

at about every third hole he playfully gazed up at Mark, winked first the right eye, then the left, then both together—and they were jet black twinkling eyes—then he contorted his plump red face with the most grotesque twitchings, and varied the effects by shooting the red tip of his tongue in and out, to the right and to the left from between his tightened lips.

Bet and Nain, in duty bound, affected to laugh, but very anxiously looked at Mark in the hope of seeing that he understood that that was Uncle Darve's "fun." But Mark sat throughout the performance like a sphinx.

As Darve cast his shoes under the settle he made another effort to amuse Mark by shaking his head with its shining black curls, as if it were a dog's. That was usually Darve's greatest success with children, but with Mark it failed.

"Perhaps he wants something to eat?" sug-

gested Bet; and Nain, having overlooked that very likely fact, tittered, and at once turned to the table along with Darve.

Mark was carefully seated on a chair near his Nain. He was exceedingly candid. The first piece of bread he set eyes on he also set his hands on and began to eat; whereupon Uncle Darve sent a loud laugh up to the rafters, and at once checked the lad's candour and appetite.

"Never mind, my boy! *Naughty* Uncle Darve for laugh—as if he does not do the same thing every day himself. Take as much as you eat my pet. Come Auntie Bet, look you sharp and boil that milk for good little Mark here. . . . . Well indeed, *doan't* Davith! grin your face at the boy, like lanterns. He not know you only *make* fool of yourself. He will think it in truth of you. Never mind, Mark; Uncle Darve is only play, and turn his face into nonsense for give you fun."

The warm milk, a good deal of egg—but very little bread—acted pleasantly on Mark. He looked brighter. Life seemed provided for. It was surer ; and when next Uncle Darve experimented with a wink and a grimace, Mark faintly smiled.

After he had finished at the table, however, Mark became moody again. Darve tried some more practical humour ; but without success. Darve took Mark's hand and dangled it about and rubbed it on his chin with three days' dark stubble on it ; but Mark was not to be impressed. Darve tried other tricks, but the boy sat on his Nain's knee with a dreamy dissatisfied gaze.

"What's the deuce to do with the lad!" said Darve impatiently. "He not laugh, nor cry, nor do the other thing!"

"What is it Mark, my boy?" asked Nain, bending over him, and touching his chin.

Mark did not speak.

"Is Mark cold?" she asked feeling his feet, which were red hot. "Is Mark cold my man?"

Mark shook his head a little.

"Is it something more to eat?"

He shook his head more decidedly.

"What then?—tell Nain, there's a little man!"

"Yes, tell Nain," urged Bet leaning forward. "What's Mark want?"

"I haven't seen the 'orses," whined Mark.

"Bless the boy!" exclaimed Nain. "Depend upon it, Mareea has told him he would sure to see the horses. Poor little fellow! Take him Davith."

Darve, now very comfortable in a pair of sheepskin slippers, muttered that the horses had been bedded for the night, and at once began with rather forced vigour to pull more faces, to snap his fingers and thumb about Mark's face, and to whistle a rollicking tune.

But Mark took no notice. Uncle Darve repeated his best effects. But Mark did not gaze in his direction; he had seen all that before.

"Oh Jenkins!" muttered Uncle Darve with an impatient smack on his own knee, "this lad is like bed-post!" and turned to the fire in disgust.

Anticipating the appeal which he knew would be made on the lad's behalf, Uncle Darve muttered variations of his disgust up the spacious open chimney. Nain, speaking very softly in Welsh, and near her son's shoulder, said, "H-ush—Hush. You may be sure there'll be no peace this night till he sees them. Get the lantern, Davith." Then aloud for Mark to hear she said in English, "Get the lantern, Davith lad, for little Mark to see the horses."

But Darve did not move. Bet leaned forward and touched her brother's slipper. He

looked black and impatient at her, but she formed her face into a strong silent appeal. He protested with a murmur about "bedded for the night, doors barred, and things off"—nevertheless, he put his hand under the settle seat and reached his boots. He got on his coat and cap, and the tall tin lantern was lifted from its nail near the door and lighted.

Mark was well muffled and carried by his uncle to the stables. The place was quite warm with the heat of the animals. One was lying down, and Boxor was making a dreamy hollow sound with its beans, as it turned its head to look at Mark through its disordered mane.

"Well, Boxor!" said Uncle Darve, but Boxor treated the unseasonable familiarity with contempt, whisped his tail and took more beans.

Mark however was delighted. His uncle, also pleased now, allowed him to stroke the

buttock and to take hold of the mane. A magnetic thrill of joy passed from the warm animal up Mark's arm and into his head and he began 'riding' on his uncle's arm. His uncle laughingly muttered, and put Mark on Boxor's back. Boxor pretended to bite and affected to be restless. Darve told it in ploughman's language to "stand still," and stand still it did; and Mark smiled his appreciation of a miracle.

Mark tells me that he remembers all this with a dreamy vividness—even the heavy-aired warmth of the stable, the sound of the beans, the rattle of the rope in the ring, the light from the lantern, and the smell of the wood-fire when he was carried back to the kitchen.

But more keenly vivid than anything, he remembers being taken in his flannel night-gown by his Nain to a sweet white-washed little bed-room. He was not taken there to

sleep, but to be shewn to Uncle Iwan—young, worn, shrunken Uncle Iwan with large dark eyes and a face almost as white as the sheets and the walls. The opening of the door and the entry of Nain and Mark changed the atmosphere of the little room and weak Uncle Iwan could not greet Mark because of a fit of coughing.

When the long deep cough was over and Iwan had regained his breath, he stretched out his arm and with his pale, blue-veined hand he touched the full and ruddy cheeks of Mark. It was like the meeting of death and life, of an end and a beginning, of despair and hope. Iwan looked searchingly at the boy. He stared enquiringly as at a vision, and with a keen flush that rose with his emotion he mused aloud, "Ah! Mareea—Mareea!" (Mark's Mother's name) and burst into tears.

In an instant a Cousin—Sweetheart Gwen

—a blue-eyed beautiful creature of eighteen with a bright complexion and curly hair of a deep red-russet hue—lightly sped from the foot to the head of the bed, not pausing even to greet Mark. She instantly mounted the low head-board and bending over it with her cheek upon Iwan's brow and her hands fitting Iwan's neck, she murmured in a petting, comforting, singing undertone of tremulous emotion innate in Welsh women when deeply touched—"Beth yw; beth yw! (What is it; what is it!) Cousin Iwan, Cousin Iwan! mewn pa beth y gallaf eich cynorthwyo? (In what way can I help you?)"

Cousin Iwan did not answer, but his two hands became lost in the over-hanging glow of Gwen's fleecy russet-red curls; and while Iwan and Gwen so communed, Mark was taken away and put to bed.

CHAPTER III.

MARK AND GWEN.

In the course of a few days, owing to the exacting illness of Uncle Iwan, Mark at the suggestion of Gwen was transferred from Bryn-nant to another farm, three miles away between Denbigh and St. Asaph; to the home of Cousin Gwen in fact.

Life there was on a larger scale. Instead of the house being on the roadside, as at Bryn-nant, it stood inland a little, shewing its double cream-coloured gables, its diamond-paned windows and square chimneys through a few neighbouring firs, a silver birch and a tall magnificent oval pear tree, the shape, as Mark's mother aptly said, of its own fruit.

Two generations earlier the cream-tinted

stucco was once stripped off the bricks and on an old woman seeing the change she exclaimed, "Why man, man, you have skimmed the cream off the house!" and after that the farm was known as Ty-Cremed, or Creamed House.

A straight drive between hawthorn hedges led to the house, and immediately beyond the house were the barns, the shippon, and the stables; and, beyond these, the stockyard and the orchard. The front door opened frankly upon the general kitchen, and this large kitchen with its blue-flagged floor and chalk scrolls; its shining oak chairs in stately distances apart; its large dish-covers like oval distorting mirrors; its crowded plate rack, the white leaf-table under the front window; the dresser with brass handles against the wall opposite, between the staircase door and the back kitchen door; the tall clockcase with a large smiling cherub face at each corner of

the dial always looking as if Time were always cheerful; the thick patchwork hearth-rug with the black Newfoundland dog Nelson and the big white cat Tib sleeping there —all these things, together with a loftier ceiling and a vaster floor, gave Mark an impression of life on a much larger scale.

The change was not very acceptable. On the evening of his arrival with Gwen he felt very lonely. He had an intense fear of moving about. He did not like the number of doors, the one opening upon the dark boarded-up staircase, the one leading to the quiet parlour, the one leading to the back kitchen and the dairy which sounded so large, hollow, aerial and bare: that mysterious unseen dairy where someone stalked about with feet the like of which he had never heard before, while a shrill metallic voice wandered around, echoed in the milkpails and pans, and reached the kitchen where Mark sat by his

cousin Gwen, like the voice of an ever-moving, ever-stalking, ever-talking being that harrowed and frightened him.

Whenever the click-clack pitter-pat sound of those pattened feet threatened to come out of the dairy into the kitchen, Mark pressed closer to Gwen as he sat on a buffet on her left opposite the fire, and tightened his grip of her dress, with unutterable fears of being kidnapped. Night was coming on. He was horribly afraid of the place. He could not bear its silence; he could not bear its sounds.

Gwen was lounging, with the back of the chair at her side, under one arm, and her hands were clasped. Her blue eyes were very intently fixed, as if she saw visions in the bright steel band of the oven door. She had forgotten Mark. All her soul was away at Brynnant—even her tears seemed to be there—but feeling Mark clutch at her skirts with both hands, and the burial of his head in her lap,

she separated her hands as with an impatient snap, impulsively bent over him and thrust the glowing ardent face of her maidenhood near his and embraced him. Her hands lifted his face and his brown eyes were looked into by her blue ones, her red curls came over and touched his cheek, as she rapidly muttered in endearing sing-song undertones, while she lifted him to her knee, "And did Auntie Gwen forget him! Naughty Auntie Gwen! Beat Auntie Gwen. *Beat* her!" she said clasping his wrist and jerking his unwilling hand against her willing cheek; but casting his arms around her neck he buried his face near hers and clung to her in one of the inexpressible agonies of boyhood.

"What is it, my dear little fellow? What is it, what is it?" she asked, trying to see his face; but he pressed closer and closer, and clung harder and harder, and sobbed.

"What is to do?" she repeated, but he

could not answer. "The poor lad is thinking of home," she mused, and Auntie Gwen did all that she imagined a solacing mother would do.

At an ebbing stage of his emotion, Auntie Gwen, to change his ideas, enticed Nelson to approach, and placed the dog's head with its large worshipping eyes on Mark's knee. Mark looked down at the dog through his tears, and one big tear dropped on Nelson's nose. Nelson indignant, withdrew his head. He rubbed his nose with his paw, and Gwen merrily laughed. She tried to entice Nelson again, but he stood aloof with his ears dropped and his tail low, and every now and again he shook his head as if to shake his nose off. Finding no relief, he lifted his paw to rub it, or stretched his leg firmly out to use it as a post for a tickling which seemed to increase with the rubbing it was fed on. Gwen laughed at every new device which Nelson used, and

when she had laughed Mark out of his grief, though not out of his great deep sighs, she took him with a candle through one of the mysterious doorways into the little parlour.

The big kitchen was like a bright week-day; the little parlour like a sombre Sabbath and bearing the same proportion to the kitchen as a Sunday to a week. The flame of the candle had a greater struggle for existence in the parlour's musty damp air than in the warmth of the kitchen. Even the pictures of Spring, Summer, and Autumn, in the set of The Seasons, looked chilled; while Winter looked appropriately realistic in that region of cold.

Gwen placed the candle on a great round table at the rim nearest a formidable mahogany chest of drawers. The table was so large that the top threatened to sit on all the straight-backed chairs if they did not press close against the walls, which they did. There was a stuffed pheasant in the centre of the ta-

ble, and a stuffed fox on the chest of drawers —the fox always looking as if it would like to get at the pheasant, and the pheasant as if it would like to run from the fox: to fly, with its wings so neatly mingled with its body, was out of the question. It was some time before Mark could be convinced that the life was really out of both of them.

Gwen went on her knees, opened the deep bottom drawer, and from between two dresses, one blue silk and the other black, brought out the shining purple feathers of a Spanish cock's tail, sewn together. She held the cock's tail to the side of her head to shew Mark what it was for, and tried to see the dim reflection of herself in the mahogany front of the drawers. The curved feathers and her curls shook with a thrill of pleasure which had passed up from her body to her head, and had left a blush in her face on its way.

Mark stood looking at her, and she, on her

knees, leaned towards him, held the feathers to *his* head, while her own roguish head poised sideways to view the effect. She instantly saw something more than the effect, the feathers were tossed away, and with the passionate exclamation, "Oh, you little Iwan; you little Iwan Wynn!" she swiftly drew him to her breast. "Oh, cariad, cariad! (love, love!) Dewch yma—yn nes! yn nes! (Come here—nearer! nearer!) Whose pet are you? Whose love? Whose little Sweetheart?" she muttered and bent him against her as she swayed to and fro, and kissed him.

From that moment Nain, Bet, and Darve became shadowy to Mark, and Auntie Gwen stood foremost as a special being for his consolation in the great lonely world of Ty-Cremed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SOUND FROM THE DAIRY.

WHILE Gwen and Mark were sitting before the fire later on that night, dreamy and moody in the quietude and the gloomy candlelight, Gwen startled Mark by a sudden rehearsal of her clear ringing soprano. Ascending the scale with "Felicity Rob" she finished with a very high pure note on . . . . "artch! Felicity Rob-artch!"

The mysterious pattened feet travelled from the dairy through the back kitchen and to the threshold of the front. There Felicity stood awaiting orders—middle-aged, tall, lean, and sinewy on a pair of pattens, in black stockings and a short dark-blue Winsey skirt with black stripes. Over this, from her bust almost to

the rim of her dark skirt, was a square-bibbed coarse apron, the long strings of which encircled her waist twice and were tied in front so tightly that the contracted skirt of the white cotton "bed gown" on her body, poked out in circling gathers at the back like an undeveloped fantail.

Everything about tall and sinewy Felicity came to points. Her bare arms were long lean shafts ending in the ten red points of her fingers and thumbs at one extreme, and the round bright points of her elbows at the other. Her nose was pointed, and looked more pointed than it really was because of the cold red tip that always commanded attention. Her chin was pointed. Her small black eyes were like keen points threatening to pierce you, and her dark greying hair was curled to a point towards the top of her head where it was fixed by a dark bone pin. But the greatest point of all Felicity's points, was her tongue. As it

rapidly clattered, its tip looked like the long thin tongue of a bird, and seemed to have the power of endless extension if occasion required.

Felicity had only stood at the kitchen door an instant when she caught sight of Mark.

"Well, well, Missis!" responded Felicity, wiping her red hands in her coarse flax apron and coming forward. She fixed herself opposite Mark, supporting herself with her hands on her knees as she stooped in a direct line towards him.

"Well, well! and this is Mark, young Mark, your little cousin? Let me see you. Bobl anwyl! (dear people!) missis, but— Why, is he not very like something in the face of your own cousin Iwan Wynn? You know what I mean? In truth, yes. The spit image of a likeness. Well! only that it *cannot* be, he has the same in his head, and the same nose. And think *you* not so, missis? Is it not so what I say? And how

are you, my son? . . . . Tut, tut! You not take fright of *me*, of Felicity Robartch, whose your own mother know? And how did you leave your mother, my boy? Dear me!—a reg'lar Bryn-nant breed in his look. A ellwch chwi siarad gymraeg? (can you speak Welsh?) Sut yr ydych chwi? (How are you?) Deuwch yma, cariad. (Come here my dear.) No? Come to Felicity. Come and see the dairy, and the cows, and the little cats—the kittans—my man. Come with *me*. Well, well! . . . . Did you ever see such a lad with such a frights?"

"He will be good friends soon," said Gwen, but Mark refuted that by clinging closer than ever to her skirts, and he was very miserable until Gwen had given Felicity Roberts some instructions about the churning in the morning and dismissed her.

"Very well," said Felicity to Mark as she departed on her pattens, "Very *well!* You

won't come to me? You won't come to Felicity!"—and Mark saw through the corner of his eye as it gratefully followed her to the back kitchen door, Felicity's thin arm rise and her bony fist close with a threat. It was playful to Felicity; but it was tragic to Mark. He was more bewildered than when he had simply heard her at a distance. The pattens, the black stockings and bare arms, the tall lank look, her angularities and points, her clattering tongue rippling a rapid resonant language he did not understand, mystified him. He clung to Gwen. He would not leave her side, not even to go to Peggy his little sister, who, by some mysterious transition which Mark did not understand, had also arrived at Ty-Cremed. Wherever Gwen sat, he sat; wherever she went he went. He anxiously watched her every move, and was oh so deeply grateful when she sat with a settled look before the fire, instead of moving about

the kitchen, filling him with the fear that every step she took might be a step out of doors and away, without him: leaving him with that terror of terrors, Felicity.

Later on the yellow candle in the tall brass candle-stick was lighted, and Mark was taken by Gwen to bed. He was taken to her bed. She had intended that from the first, but whether intended or not it would have ultimately come about for Mark would more readily have slept on a crow's nest in the rookery than with Felicity, or alone, or even with Peggy, in that strange house.

Peggy, on the other hand, quietly ascended the dark boarded-up staircase with mysterious Felicity as if Felicity were an angel leading her to new realms for her enquiring eye, while Mark marvelled and wondered. He marvelled greatly at seeing Peggy do this every night; but he marvelled most when he beheld her alive and well in the morning.

CHAPTER V.

A QUESTION OF TOILET.

For Mark's own good, Gwen decided to nightly put him to bed at eight o'clock—two hours before her own time. This was very good as a theory; but notwithstanding the allurements of apples, pears, hazel-nuts, lump sugar and peppermint drops, it took many nights and far more kisses, and still more promises, to put it into practice. Even at last it was only effected by the compromise that Gwen was to see him to sleep. Sometimes he awoke after she had gone, and then it was woe, woe, woe, all over the house until she ran up and saw him 'off' again, by casting herself alongside of him and pretending to go to sleep.

In time, however, Mark could awake and bear the darkness of the room and not cry out. He could patiently lie, awaiting the lifting of the latch of the bottom door which shut out the stairs from the kitchen; patiently await Gwen's approach stair by stair until her hand was on the door of the room, and in came the candlelight, the light of her blue eyes, and her bright face of delicate outline with its wavy loops of fleecy curly hair too assertive to be kept in any precise form.

Gwen always gave an enquiring glance at Mark as she passed to place the candle on a high chest of drawers. Whenever he was awake she undressed behind the high foot-board of the old bed, sitting on a chair. Then, Mark has told me, he could only see the motions of her head and the liftings of her arms until she came from behind there like a chorister in white. Then she would

give the candle its nightcap, Mark would hear her cross the floor, feel the clothes pulled in preparation for a leap; then the leap, a nestling embrace, a shuddering hug in gratitude for warmth, a kiss, and Gwen's cheek (sometimes cold) banking itself on his.

At other times, when Mark was fast asleep, Gwen disrobed at the side of the bed. He discovered this fact without seeking it. He suddenly awoke one night from a dream of heavy plough horses to Sweetheart Gwen like a fair half-robed spirit vanishing to the foot of the bed.

Gwen was no sooner by his side that night than he very wakefully asked, "Did I frighten you?"

"When?"

"Just now. When you ran."

"No."

"But you ran so fast—"

"You little chatter! Gwen can run if she

likes. What wakened you? But come; Gwen's tired. Good-night."

"But if you'd been *tired*, you'd have *walked*. I always walk when I'm tired."

"But if you run you get to a seat sooner," said Gwen.

"Yes," replied Mark baulked. "Yes, you do that. . . . . But—but the bed was the soonest."

"Well, I'm in bed! Good-night, you little rogue!" replied Gwen, hugging him, and Mark nestled nearer and was soon asleep.

In the morning before he was fully awake Mark stretched his arms towards Gwen; but Gwen was not there and her place was cold. He sat up and looked about. The sun was fiercely shedding its beams on the chest of drawers and especially on the tall brass candlestick woefully obsolete in the morning light. He saw his clothes on a chair. They suggested getting up. In a moment he was on the floor. I, and the tape of his nightgown

was untied; 2, and one arm was out of the sleeve and his head was hidden; 3, and the gown was off, just as Gwen opened the door.

With a bound he was on the bed again and soon in it, with only his head visible.

"I thought you were not afraid of Auntie Gwen?" she asked half laughing.

"I'm not; please will you get my singlet, and my drawers—and the others."

"But why did you run?" asked Gwen, leaning over him. "Eh? Why?"

"I—I think I was tired."

"Tired after a good night's rest and sleeping so long this morning? Are you too tired to get up?" she asked roguishly.

"Oh no!" he exclaimed forgetfully casting the clothes off; but he instantly coiled under again with only his hair and one peeping eye visible.

"So you are too tired, after all?"

"N—o," he answered.

"Then get up. Come. Your egg is boiling."

He moved to rise. On second thought he remained where he was and in a tone of unavoidable revelation, he confessed—"I've got no clothes on!"

"Haven't you?" asked Gwen with mock surprise.

"Didn't you see me?"

"When?"

"Just now."

"Yes—and you were frightened. You were frightened of your kind good Auntie Gwen!"

'No. Never. Never," said he shaking his head.

"Then what did you jump for?"

"It was *nearest*."

"You little rascal, come out of that! Let me dress you."

He responded to the call in a sidling sort of

way as Gwen reached his clothes. When she came to the skirt and was buttoning it, Mark said, "Mother never rubs *hard* when she washes me—and she always lets *me* wipe."

"Very well," replied Gwen liking him for the cunning of his candour. "He's a deep one is this," she muttered. Mark heard this, but could not understand it. He added it to one or two other sayings he could not understand; and wondered how hard Gwen *would* rub.

The moment he heard the sound of the water he closed his eyes, held his face like a grim martyr and clutched his fists with a determination not to shrink unless absolutely necessary. But this was always a crisis. Though he knew precisely how gently Gwen did wash, he always wondered how each particular wash would begin and end. Morning after morning he fervently hoped she could do the whole of his face with one wetting, for it

was awful to have it done by damp instalments. Indeed he was a most thoughtful lad for his own tenderness and so managed the evading swivel-like movements of his nose when Gwen was using the flannel, that the washing was done with the least amount of friction possible.

"Why," he said that morning when he was sure the crisis was over, "that's not *half* as hard as Mother, when she's in a hurry. But let *me* wipe."

Gwen handed him the towel, he used it very tenderly and just before giving it back he said, "Mother always *wets* the comb, and takes hold like this; and if there's a stop, she let's *me* pull." He had said this on previous mornings; but it always seemed worth repeating.

"Very well, my boy. But how does she curl it on the top?"

"Oh *that*?" he asked, feeling his long top-lock. "Like this—round and round with her

two fingers and then draws one out at each end, then touches the curl with her hand to see if it will stand—if it will, it's done!"

"I see," replied Gwen. She carried out all his instructions, and gave him a kiss of completion and took him down stairs to his breakfast.

After breakfast Gwen left him and he sat rather moodily near the fire with his eye anxiously set in the direction of the dairy. Felicity's pattens pattered to and fro, her voice echoed and re-echoed through the back kitchen to the front, and caused him a provoking, haunting, uncontrollable dread.

CHAPTER VI.

MISHAPS.

Two weeks passed. As at Bryn-nant so at Ty Cremed, the horse was the most wonderful and admirable animal to Mark. He had a prejudice against cows. He did not like their big dull eyes, their restless tails, and especially their horns. Even every teat was a horn to him. Nor had Felicity helped him to a better opinion of the creatures. The very first time he ventured to watch her milking, she levelled a teat at him and spurted a long blue line of milk straight into his eye. That confirmed his distrust. Cows were capable of anything after that ; and the profound fact that Felicity could make the milk come as if out of her own palms, as Mark first thought, caused him

to dread her as something unearthly and unnatural.

He forthwith returned to his original faith in the horse, and the farm hands were soon made aware of it. Mark met them coming from the fields. The men allowed him to ride cross-legged in front of them while they rode sideways to the clinking and jingling of the chains; and they put him on the horses' backs in the stalls while the animals had their midday meal.

Indeed Mark became such a famous rider, in the stable and out, that one day he was permitted to ride quiet Denbigh barebacked and with only the mane for reins, down the farm yard to the shadowy green and weedy little pond near the front garden of the house, for a drink. True, Denbigh was very slow and deliberate; but fancy riding a barebacked horse all alone, with only the man looking on from the stable door! Why, it was a new epoch!

Denbigh walked very quietly to the edge of the pond, first put one leg forward and then the other, until the forefeet were covered. At the sight of the water beneath him Mark clutched firmer with both hands at the mane, Denbigh innocently bent its head for a drink, and in a moment Mark was jerked over its neck into the pond. The horse, startled, backed out, and as Mark held to the mane he was dragged to dry land, soaking and coated with green. Denbigh went off to the stable with a neigh, the ducks quacked, the men bounded down the yard, the collie barked, Gwen rushed out of the house with her face like a berry and her hair apparently redder and more fleecy than usual; and with Mark between her hip and her arm she carried him indoors for a change of clothes.

Felicity was very inconsiderate on that occasion. She laughed all over the dairy, through the back-kitchen, into the front, up-

stairs, in the front room where Gwen sent her for his Sunday clothes, and down the stairs again. The house was full of her fiendish merriment.

"Well this is a Christen for him! This is a Christen; through and through, with Denbigh for minister and missis for god-mother. Oh Mark, Mark, you are made of mischief, made of mischief! Why, missis, he is wet to the bones, and shiver like a weaned calf he is, and green as a grass. Put him to dry in the oven, missis!"

"No," cried Mark.

"Go away, Felicity Robartch," said Gwen only half serious.

"I never did watch such a sight of a drench. Had you better wring the boy and hang him on the clothes-horse?"

"He has had horse enough," said Gwen.

"Well, 'live one whatever. He will have 'nough of stable by this. Will you not give

him wash all over, missis? Look at his hair with the greens in it, and hang like ribbons, and his ears all mud, and his nose red;—though to be sure that is colour of its own cold. 'Tis hope he will not have fevers on our hands, for 'tis so far to Lerpool."

"Hold your foolish talk!" said Gwen impatiently, "and bring me some warm water and the flannel and soap; and warm those clothes."

"Well you hear of such like at times, missis, and he has blue in his skins already, see."

"Hold—your—talk!" cried Gwen, "bring the warm water."

"He won't forget his *cold* bathing for time to come—if he live through it, for his teeths rattles now as if he was take to his bed for shivers and trembles. . . . . Here's the water for you. I wouldn't be one *bit* surprise, missis, for, see you, his little stomack is shake and his toes is turn up, and—"

"For goodness sake, Felicity Robartch, go back to that dairy and shut the doors after you, and if you want to talk, talk to the pans and the churn, with your fevers and chills; the boy will be all right as soon as he gets into warm clothes."

Felicity closed the kitchen door behind her, and Gwen soon had Mark in his Sunday things—Mark rather glad that something had happened to compel him to wear them.

* * * * * *

On the whole Mark was rather unfortunate in his country life. Next day he went to the nive in the garden in front of the house, and, in his ignorance of the latent powers of bees, tried to lash them off their balance with a whip. It was a diversion that didn't last long. A bee, which Mark protested he never hit, alighted on his bare shoulder, sent him off *his* balance and made him dance as if mad. He yelled very large double O's all the way

from the garden to the kitchen and complained that a bee had run a needle and thread into his shoulder, and hadn't taken it out again. Gwen professed to make the shoulder well with the charm of a kiss, then rubbed it with washing blue, and tried to find the marsh-mallow paste.

Felicity was sorrowful over this, but she had such an awkward way of shewing it. At the sound of Mark's great cry, she stalked from the dairy into the kitchen and began to ripple off the most excitable Welsh and English to Gwen, to Mark, to the floor, and to the rafters.

"Marsh mallows, missis," she continued, "is perfect cure for poison-sting, or wart, or rheumatics, or tooth, or strains, or sore, or scratches, or pains, or anything—"

"The boy has only a sting at present," said Gwen quietly, looking in the drawers and cupboard for the pot of green paste.

"And its grow by the garden's hedge in flower this minute. I will pluck a poultice of it and welcome, missis, if you like, for stings is so bad for quick swelling and betimes the swellings does not sink, and they are there for ever unless the people is poison to death as is known before now in bee bites. But marshmallow will save if anything will save, boiled; to have it hot as he can bear it, and hotter when he used to it. I have been sting many times on my legs and others when I was his years, and was live near marshmallow, and my mother boil 'em on me. Yes, indeed; shall I pluck a hand, missis?"

Gwen told her she was looking for a pot of first class paste that would do better than the poultice, and ran upstairs to her room.

"Poor Mark!" said Felicity taking his stung arm in her seggy palm and leaving marks like vaccination prints wherever she touched. To Mark's horror she drew him to

her and kissed him in a wild manner more with her teeth than her lips—kissed him yet again though he was on the verge of a fit in her embrace, and crying aloud to be free.

Gwen hastened down with a pot of paste and quickly sent Felicity about her business. But Felicity made it part of her business to look back when she reached the kitchen door. There she halted, tall, grim, and ill-tempered, awaiting Mark's customary anxious gaze after her. She hooked the little finger of each hand on each side of her mouth, placed her two forefingers at her lower eyelids, and the instant Mark's eyes turned in her direction she jerked her hands downwards, shot forward her tongue and vanished.

Mark shuddered towards Gwen who was about to lift him on her knee. Gwen looked around, but saw nothing.

"What is it, Mark?" she asked, but he could not answer. To describe the vanishing

horror was beyond him; but it was gruesomely vivid on his mind. Wherever he looked he saw it. If he didn't look, he saw it. It was within him, haunting him. When, when would he be free from that terrible Felicity Robartch?

CHAPTER VII.

GWEN AT HER EASE.

THERE was something drowsy about the afternoons at Ty Cremed. After the emptied dinner things were removed, and the blue slate hearth was brushed, and the fire irons were dusted, the whole kitchen seemed to take a nap. The fire was piled up with plenty of reserve fuel to slowly burn itself away in dreams of flame and smoke; all the doors were closed; Peggy was with Felicity, as she almost invariably was; Nelson lounged in a corner with his head on his paws, while white Tib lay flat like a marble bas-relief in the centre of the dark hearthrug; and Gwen with an intuitive seeking after physical comfort would wheel the big sofa nearer the fire.

With something of the instinct of Nelson and Tib, she seated herself on the sofa just far enough from the arm to lean against it in an attitude which could only be called sitting simply because it was not quite lying. This attitude received its perfecting touch by Gwen swinging her limbs from the floor to the sofa and drawing them near her with a self-huddling motion of settling down for a delicious hour of lethargic ease. Gwen, most attentive to Mark at all other hours of the day, consecrated this one to herself, and Mark was left to his own resources. Not that Gwen slept: she simply reclined there with her arm on the arm of the sofa, her cheek on her palm, and her fingers among her hair. Silent and moody she lounged, now looking into the fire, now at Nelson and Tib, and now through the window at the trees and sky.

Travelling afternoon beams would slant from the window to the sofa silently, turn her

hair into a shimmering crown, kindle her bright eyes and roseate face into a special brilliance for a moment or two, and then leave her and the place in a still more dreamy shade.

Mark got into the way of carrying his buffet just beneath her, where he sat with his head near her lap and she played with his cheek or his hair; or he climbed the sofa, and nestled in the most comfortable nook of Gwen's huddled form. Then her hand sought his cheek, his neck, or his chin, and without a word they both mused through an hour of the drowsy afternoon.

Sometimes frolicsome thoughts overtook Gwen's lethargic mood and she abruptly tittered, gently shaking Mark as he reclined against her. It was in that mood that she discovered Mark's most ticklesome parts, and plagued him with attempts and threats of her probing fingers from his chin down to the

soles of his feet. Sometimes Mark retaliated by thrusting his hands under Gwen's chin, and Gwen pretended to be as hysterical as he was, writhing with well-affected excruciation. She defended herself by catching Mark in his most vulnerable part—between the thigh and the rib—working her finger and thumb until he withdrew his hands and coiled up utterly helpless beneath the roguish twinkles of her blue eyes and the glow of her animated face. Then she stroked his hair from off his brow to press her warm cheek there; and while doing so one day, she asked:

"Who's little sweetheart are you?"

Mark shook his head.

"You don't know? Don't know? Why, you are mine. You are Auntie Gwen's. . . . . My little sweetheart; my little Iwan," she said in an ardent whisper.

"I'm—Mark," he pleaded.

Gwen tittered.

"How can I *be* your sweetheart? What *is* a sweetheart?"

"Well, you love Auntie Gwen, don't you?"

"Yes, I love Auntie Gwen. Oh yes!"

"Do you love her very, very much?"

"As very very as I can."

"But how very?"

"That very!" he cried putting his arms around her neck and giving her a hug.

Gwen swerved her feet off the sofa, fitted his arms more securely around her neck, and clasping her own about his body she sprang from the sofa into the middle of the kitchen floor.

There she swayed him to and fro in the hammock of her arms to the accompaniment of Nelson's bounds and barks; there she whirled him round and round, and suddenly turned him helplessly laughing on his neck on the hearthrug. There, kneeling over him, Gwen as wild and breathless as Mark

himself, tickled all the laughter out of him, tickled him until he lay in a paralysis of delight while Nelson looked on with his tongue dangling and a bright smiling approval in his great dark eyes. Then a pause came. Gwen remained on her knees, resting, with her hands clasped before her, watching Mark and Nelson, her face glowing, her eyes sparkling, and her frame quivering.

Then a dreamy reaction came. Gwen still rested on her knees but with one arm along Nelson's back and her hand on his head, for the dog had moved near her for *his* share of caress. The three remained motionless and silent. Auntie Gwen and Mark did not exchange a look or a word. Both gazed into the fire. The clock ticked muffled in its long hollow case, but nothing heeded it; a great fly buzzed and bobbed at the window in the declining sunlight, but nothing heeded that; the trees gently moved to and fro against the yellowing

sky, but nothing heeded them; the kettle sang with a low modulation of liquid tones and occasional breathings of steam; but nothing heeded the song: all was dreamy abstraction until a sound caught Mark's ear. He rose to his knees, and with the enthusiasm of a discoverer he pulled Gwen's arm and exclaimed "Auntie Gwen!"

"What, my boy?"

"When *our* kettle boils, mother always makes the tea!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A CRISIS.

One Tuesday morning Gwen was very anxiously preparing to go off at post haste on the mare Madam. The large kitchen was full of commotion. Gwen, Felicity, Peggy, Mark, and Nelson were all very much concerned. Mark wanted to go with Gwen; but Gwen was too busy and distressed to heed him. She was in her long loose dark blue riding skirt, whip in hand, impatiently lashing her robe as she hastened from the parlour to the kitchen with her felt hat and its cock's feathers heedlessly awry on the side of her head.

Felicity, who had been very busy finding some of the articles of attire in which her young mistress stood, was once more sent up-

stairs for a scarf that wasn't there, and into the parlour for gloves that were not there, and upstairs yet again for both scarf and gloves which Felicity declared at the top of her voice from the top of the stairs, "wasn't neether there as well."

In the bustle of the hasty preparations, Peggy at the suggestion of Auntie Gwen tried to interest Mark in Nelson; but both Nelson and Mark were individually so concerned in the movements of Gwen that they regarded Peggy as a very great nuisance. Nelson did not hesitate to shew it. He leapt from Peggy's wooing addresses so violently that at last he abruptly knocked Mark in a bumping posture on the hard floor, resulting in pathetic cries and contortions direct at Auntie Gwen.

What with the bounds and barks of Nelson, the ill-tempered top-voice top-stair confirmations from Felicity that the gloves and the

scarf were not there; what with the chatter of Peggy and the cries of Mark and her own failure to find the things where she was "sure they were," Auntie Gwen became enraged, she seized Nelson by the slack fullness of his hide behind his neck and dragged him whining to the door of the back kitchen. There she gave him a humiliating help forward with the side of her right foot, just as Felicity came red and scowling from the staircase and exclaimed:

"The very deuce is in all things this morning! Or the things 'emselves is in the deuce himself, m.ssis, for I can't find them nowhere. Nowhere!"

"Have you looked well in the parlour?"

"Better than well!" answered the old familiar servant, provoked.

"In all the drawers?"

"In all everything; and out of it too! In high and low I have," retorted Felicity now roused too much to keep back her sentiments.

"But to speak truth, yes indeed truth, missis, your things never knows where you are when you take them off. It's the same always; always; it's everlastings losings with you, and always was—a pity there was not string 'tween you and the clothes! And me in the middle of my churn!"—and off went muttering Felicity to the dairy.

Gwen knew the truthfulness of Felicity's reproach and as soon as Felicity disappeared Gwen whispered to Peggy, "Peggy, my girl, you go upstairs and see if you can find my scarf and my gloves and my little shawl anywhere, there's a clever one!"

Peggy went; and Mark, now lying on his back and kicking his legs to attract attention, said, "I'll tell you where they are; if you'll let me come, Auntie."

"Where, my pet?"

"They're under the bed. I put them."

"Oh you vixen!" said Auntie Gwen drop-

ping on her knees and drawing him to her. "Good Mark for telling Auntie Gwen!"

Felicity called from the dairy, "My word, missis! but I'd like that little demond to feel the flat of my hand—and not to go and kiss him into mischiefs and tricks like that! A ydyw yn bosibl? (Is it possible?) Allan o'r ffordd!" (Out of the way!) cried Felicity passionately, and rushed through the kitchen upstairs for the things.

"Brysiwch (Quick) Felicity!" called Gwen after her.

"Speak to lightnings, missis!" muttered Felicity and continued her course.

"Let me come, Auntie!" Mark appealed.

"Not this time, Mark; next. I won't be long. Poor Uncle Iwan is very ill, my boy. Love Auntie, Mark; and be a good, good boy. Auntie won't be long! Play with Nelson—and go and see the calves—and the ducks—and Auntie will bring you some of Nain's cake

back, and we'll go a long ride with Madam another day."

Felicity soon brought the missing things down, and Gwen soon went off at a gallop.

During the early part of the morning Mark was unusually good, playing merrily with Peggy. At dinner however there were frowning symptoms of uneasiness, and he twice muttered, "I want Auntie Gwen!"

When the afternoon came and she was still away and Felicity took Gwen's place in the big kitchen, he began to fear she never would return. A depression overcame him. He was restive, and fretful. He ran from the kitchen to the parlour; and half way up the dark stairs; and down again. He found his way to the barn where even the cackling flight of a hen could not startle him, or the sight of an egg in a corner appease him. Burying his face in one of the heaps of straw be broke into sobs. He wanted Auntie Gwen, Auntie

Gwen; Auntie Gwen, he wanted. He declared that he wouldn't stay without her; he'd go down the cartway, along the road, and find the steamer, and go to the same seat in the cabin and sail home.

Felicity, missing him, searched and discovered him in the barn.

"Beth! y chwi yma? (What! You here?)" she muttered, and tried to coax him.

But he huddled deeper into the straw as if to huddle through it. At the sound of her approach he kicked the planet, and cried aloud to heaven for Auntie Gwen. Felicity seeing the hen's egg in the corner gladly picked it up to use it as a bribe.

"See, Mark, here's is a pretty Cochin Chiney's egg. Will Mark have it light boiled for his tea? Come and carry it and boil it with Felicity. Here my good little boy—Felicity's pet he is—Felicity's own little pet—feel, my good good Markie, feel the Cochin Chiny

warm," and Felicity coaxingly touched his hand with the egg.

The touch startled Mark. He swept his hand behind him with such abhorrent force that "the Cochin Chiney" broke with a splash, spluttering all over Felicity like a shower of molten silver and gold.

"Well! The villain's of a tempers in him! Did one ever see the likes of such a tricks as this in a lad! To hit me all over like this with the egg I was glad to boil for the little demond! Good chance it was *new*—but no thanks to him for *that*," she said taking up a whisp of straw and wiping herself. "After I clean myself all over in my 'second-best.' Well, look you!" she muttered surveying the gold and silver splashes. "It is beyond reckon where it is splash. Gwaeth-waeth! Gwaeth-waeth! (Worse and worse! Worse and worse!) More like a dozen eggs than but one, and the shells like sticking plaisters all

over wherever I pick. Ugh!—Hen epa! Hen dyhiryn! (Old monkey! Old knave!) *I* bury head you! Kick will you? Ha! Naughty Mark. Naughty naughty Mark as ever boy breathe. Shame of you! You will not *have* the egg boil now—nor any other to *my* knowing this day, if you dies for it! It has spoil my gown I do believe—and not long since my best! If my best had been *it* I would have murdered his life off him, and made him take off every speck with his lick of the tongue. I would! Ugh! You villain to go and split the egg 'fore I know where I was, with myself or my clothes. Hullo, Peggy, you come? Peggy is *my* pet; Peggy shall have egg;—for she is good girl and not a bad boy. See, Peggy, what egg he broke with his tempers—pity the hen did not know he was come with his bad humours, and wait—'stead of waste herself like this. And a Cochin Chiney, Peggy!—eggs as is more value than

two of any other an' she lay so seldom, poor bird, to have all the trouble for smash. Penny each at Denbigh market they are; and he must pay for it. There now! 'Tis clean a little bit now! but no thanks to him but what I was *all* egg; and shells too."

Felicity beckoned Peggy aside and whispered with very expressive gesticulations,

"Peggy dear, go you to him and coax your little brother for me. Tell him you have Denbigh sweets—and honey—and all things in the house. There's a little 'oman."

Felicity stepped lightly out of the barn and stood where she could peep through a hole in the door.

Peggy approached Mark by climbing some of the straw.

"Mark," she said when about a yard from him.

He answered by looking round with one eager eye, and his hair as rough as the straw.

Then he ventured to look with both eyes in search of Felicity, and not seeing her he was inclined to rise.

"Come and sit with me in the kitchen, Mark, and we will play horses with Nelson."

He leaned meditating with his face in the straw again.

"Have you got a whip?" he asked muffled.

"No; but we'll soon get one."

He meditated again.

"And reins?" he asked rising and trying to sigh away the past.

"And we'll soon get those."

"And who'll drive?" he enquired looking for somebody he hoped he would not see.

"She's gone now. But Mark, you needn't be frightened of Felicity. She's very good; *very* good to *me*. She lets me go with her to milk, and I skim the cream with a saucer, and drink it, and I churn, and I weigh the

butter, and I stamp it with the acorn and leaf, and I wash the wooden bowls and spoons in hot water, and she puts me to stand on the dairy slab to peep through the little swinging window to see the apples in the orchard, and she sends me on messages to the back kitchen—and always has paradises in her pocket."

"Has she?"

"Yes!"

"Does she give them to *you*?"

"Yes! Lots."

"When?"

"Always!"

"Have you any now?"

"N–o. . . . . But let me feel!" said Peggy pushing her hand down her frock pocket.

She pulled out a handkerchief, then some early acorns (Mark began to be interested), then a pencil, and half of a crab apple.

He stepped towards her with his eyes on the apple and Peggy instantly gave it to him. He was too eagerly watching the emptying of the pocket to try the apple then. He held it in reserve, anxiously waiting for the return of her hand. It brought only a shoe-button, and Mark viewed that bit of feminine care with masculine contempt.

The hand dived again and brought from the very corner of the pocket half of a paradise. It looked dull, encrusted and dusty; but to both Peggy and Mark the discovery was like that of ore rich with possibilities.

Peggy popped the find into the clarifying crucible of her mouth. Mark was disappointed. He frowned with demanding vexation as he saw Peggy briskly turning it over from cheek to cheek.

"Here," said Peggy quietly. "I was only cleaning it."

Mark popped it on his tongue and made

the most of it. He very soon bit it in two however and offered the biggest to Peggy.

"No," she said shaking her dark hair, her dark eyes all of a smile, "not that one."

"Will you have the biggest—after awhile? When I've made it littler?"

"I don't want the biggest at all—"

Lo! there and then his breathing suddenly paused, his eyes widened with surprise. "Why, it's gone!" he cried. "What a shame. . . . . It wasn't half done!"

"Swallowed?" asked Peggy, looking at his throat.

"Yes," said he feeling his chest.

"Which?"

"The big one—and I was keeping that for you."

"No; I was going to have the small one, Mark."

"Oh no! I was going to *make* you have

the big one; I was really; but I can't now; and the little one's mine—by rights."

"Oh you can have it if you want it."

"Well you know Mother says it's greedy to give the littlest to anybody else. Will you have a bit of it? There! There's the biggest piece of the little one. Any more in your pocket? Feel, Peggy!"

Peggy took the biggest piece of the little one, and felt the corners of her pocket again. But without success. She felt again but with a similar result. Mark seemed to think her sense of touch was defective, for he called, "Let me try!" and dived his hand in her pocket and pulled it inside out.

"No," he contemptuously muttered. "Nothin'! only dust. . . . . All mine's done. I wish I hadn't let that big one go! Does she always have paradise?"

"Yes; let us go to the kitchen. P'raps

Felicity will give me some; but you musn't cry, or she won't."

"I *must* if she makes me; and she always does. *I* want Auntie Gwen! And I'll go. I'll find her. She's gone to Nain's; and I'll go, too."

CHAPTER IX.

THE CRISIS CONTINUED.

MARK ventured to the kitchen with Peggy. Felicity was knitting, in an old-fashioned wicker arm-chair like an inverted cradle. Mark no sooner saw her than he went rubbing himself along the furthest wall with frowning reminiscent glances towards the chair. Felicity dropped her knitting on her knee and summoning a special smile to her severe face, she beckoned him with her long forefinger. He declined the invitation.

Peggy went boldly up to Felicity to shew Mark that the woman was perfectly tame and harmless, and Felicity with the same purpose lifted Peggy on her knee. Mark then cast part of one eye like a crescent in their direc-

tion; and Felicity by way of decoy put her hand in her pocket and made as loud a rustle as she could with a paper packet. Mark's crescent slowly through developing phases turned on them like a full moon. He saw Felicity with very marked ceremony put something into Peggy's mouth, and then something into her own, followed by a loud smacking of the lips.

Peggy with her mouth away from Felicity slyly transferred her "something" to her hand and quietly kept it there. Mark had not noted that, and when he heard the paper rustle back into Felicity's pocket his tongue seemed to sink into his heart, and he bent his head on the nearest chair in the deepest and direst covetous dejection. He did so wish he had the courage to go up to Felicity and hover around her pocket; but not even for the whole packet could he risk the clutch of her hand, and the gaze of her ferret-like eyes.

It was very foolish of him, and he now confesses it, but in regard to gaunt Felicity he had a childish imagination founded upon fear, and he could not help it. To him she was supernaturally grim.

Peggy in a short time worked her way off Felicity's knee, worked round to Mark and slyly transferred her big sticky acid drop into Mark's hand. Mark put it in his safest receptacle, his mouth; and while the sweet morsel lasted he was happy.

After its dissolution his restiveness returned. Felicity put aside her knitting and tried to be sociable; but Mark could not make himself at home with her, not even with the side of her gown where her pocket was. After several vain attempts Felicity lost patience and jeered at his timidity, pretended to set Nelson at him, and made unearthly guttural noises in the drawers and cupboards and up the staircase and chimney.

Peggy to counteract this, again and again tried to assure him by practical illustrations that Felicity was nevertheless perfectly tame and good-natured. But Mark would not, could not, believe it. He viewed her, when she was not looking, like one would view a lightning flash; and hid his eyes in dread. Even the thickly-sugared brown bread 'butty' which the dairy woman put on a chair at a good distance from him, even the apple she offered, even the brown honey she shewed in syrupy drip from a spoon, even the offer of acid drops, even the 'horse' she brought him from the top room would not instil him with artificial confidence. He would have none of them from her, and when at last he would not even look at some twisted curl-like candy which she breathlessly ran up to her own room for, she lost patience, her passion rose, it ran in her like black fire, she growled between her teeth, "Hen mule! (old mule).

Nid oes dim yn ei foddhau! (Nothing pleases him.) 'Tis 'nough provoke to a saint!" and seizing him by his skirts at the back she transfixed him between her knees, bent over him and brought down her seggy palm on Mark's plump tenderness with rhythmic smacks.

The screaming and the scrambling and the kicking, then! Nelson bounded and barked; the cat scampered from chair to chair; and little Peggy, striking for kin and liberty, brought her flat hand with a circular sweep on Felicity's cheek as she belaboured Mark. At that same instant Mark also took poor Felicity by surprise, for in the height of his agony he bit her through her spare skirts on the leg. He might have been a viper the way she dropped him; and she reefed her skirts to see if she bled. There was no blood, but there was the oval mark of teeth which she passionately commanded Mark to inspect. As he declined

to obey, but remained kicking and squalling on the floor she swung him by the skirts into position and with a much quicker and smarter rhythm attacked him again. Peggy screamed and tugged, and tugged and screamed for his release; and when released they both sobbed in each other's arms their inexpressible longings for home.

At the sight of them Felicity collapsed in a chair near the window table, supported her head with her hands, and cried as bitterly as they did.

It was an improvised part-song for two weeping trebles, a wailing contralto, and a barking bass, for Nelson came in with excellent time at the end of each bar. The composition was not very harmonious, but it was very effective, the trebles being chiefly remarkable for their tremulous pathos, the contralto for her dramatic fervour and hysterical sincerity, and the bass for the quality of his

two solitary lower-register notes, and the correctness of his time.

The contralto's part towards the close of the work was interspersed with the following recitatives—"Arglwydd! (Lord!) I go mad! 'Tis too bad of 'em. Too bad it is. Oh you naughty devils of a lad and girl to fill me with this, till I sweat myself weak, and do not know whether I am in sense or not. Bad, bad, boy! I'll tell your Auntie as you call her. I'll tell her a bit of myself too, as leave me with two fiends like this. Oh *cry! cry!* you wicked, wicked wretches!"—the "cry! cry!" being delivered to the ceiling with a murderous lifting of the right arm and the "wretches" being delivered to the table with a rebounding thump of the fist.

The part of the bass was varied at this point, for Nelson went barking from the contralto to the trebles and from the trebles to the contralto like a prophet proclaiming peace.

But it was crying peace when there was no peace, for on Nelson's third visit, the hysterical contralto caught him under the jaw with her foot and thus dotted one of his bass notes for him, and sent him howling high tenor notes under the table.

The trebles responded to this with a duet of reinvigorated sobs, and the contralto in a deeply emotional passage declared with her two hands clenched and extended before her on the table, and her head nodding, "I *kill* you two's and myself, if you turn me to a temper of murder like this!" which at once pitched the sobs at least two octaves higher.

It was too high indeed to last long. The female treble soon dropped an octave and then dropped into silence altogether, leaving the male voice to a solo in monotone, for the contralto and bass were also lulled into calm.

It must be admitted that the closing solo for the male voice, from the very first note to

the very last, was absolutely unworthy of the earlier numbers. It was insufferably long, maddeningly monotonous and wearisome; lacking variety of tone; wanting light and shade, and utterly devoid of sympathetic treatment. The execution was exasperatingly execrable in its dull and dreary indifference to the laws of melody and art. The voice moaned and droned into the most irritating monotony to the sofa seat. On, on it went; moan, moan, moan, without even the impetus of grief or the sincerity of tears.

"Duwcs anwyl!" (dear God!) exclaimed Felicity. "He *is* drive me mad; *mad!*" and she walked up and down the kitchen, "mad as all Denbigh 'sylum into one. He send me clean out of my head if he groan, groan like that; and his face as dry as tinder, I know! I must have a breath of wind to keep my reasons," she said opening the door leading to the dairy, and passing through.

Peggy followed her, and Mark with his face still to the sofa seat, moaned on.

The mystery was that he himself did not weary of it. Even when he half lifted his head to survey the hearthrug with his blood-shot and swollen eyes, it still went on. It went on even as he slackened one leg and let himself down in a heap on the rug before the fire. He now and then sobbed and sighed a little, but returned to his moan as if that were his only comfort.

After a long, long time the moan became muffled. It sounded afar off down the depths of the hearthrug. It gradually sounded further and further and at last it was silenced and he was still.

When Felicity and Peggy returned to the kitchen, they found Mark and Nelson fast asleep on the hearthrug.

Felicity cautioned Peggy, went about on tiptoe and covered Mark with her black and

white check shawl. Then she bent over him on her knees, lifted his hair from his wet forehead with her finger tips, and gave nestling Nelson a triple pat on the brow.

Mark slept until tea-time.

A fairy might have been to lay the table. He had not seen such a feast for tea since his arrival. There were three of the best cups and saucers, a big currant cake, blackberry jam, eggs, and—but quite secondary—the large oval home-baked loaf and fresh butter.

Mark was very hungry. That, and the sight of the blackberry jam reconciled him a little to the situation. Not wholly, however. He would not allow Felicity to lift him to his chair, though it had a cushion from the parlour on it, and he was not comfortable until she sat at one end of the table and he sat at the other, with Peggy as an envoy between the two courts whose relationships were very much strained.

The egg wholly and solely to himself, did brighten his eyes (still red with crying) as he took up his spoon and looked at Peggy. By that look Felicity gratefully noted that Mark was willing to resume diplomatic relationship. Extremely diplomatic—the rogue! He was willing to eat her egg, her cake, and her jam, and to drink two cups of her tea; but after the feast he would not permit her to approach his throne even in humble suppliance for a courtly kiss of peace. No, no. But he was quiet, if moody and doleful, and Felicity thankfully left him alone.

As she sat knitting in the wicker chair she fancied that the same lavish table at supper-time would win him over for the night. She fancied so until a little before supper-time—when he asked for Auntie Gwen in a very exacting tone. Felicity at once began to lay the cloth and to place the unfinished cake and the blackberry jam on the table. It was a

successful move. Mark rose from the buffet to the table, scrambled up a chair, and with Felicity at a safe distance he ate very heartily indeed of the cake and the jam. The prospect became more cheery and he played with Nelson a little. But in the course of performing a feat which had become the admiration of Gwen—that of putting his bare arm between the jaws of patient Nelson—Nelson gave a whine of pain, and, on examination, Mark found a lump under the dog's jaw: the footprint of Felicity's kick.

That was full of painful reminiscence; he thought of Felicity—and her temper—and her foot; and with compassion for good Nelson and a most pathetic consideration for himself he lost courage. The fading light in the window brought him nearer the bed problem, a problem he had put off throughout the afternoon in the hope that Auntie Gwen would return. Auntie Gwen

had *not* returned; dusk was setting in; and he did not like Felicity's resolute walk to the back kitchen to bring her own long steel candlestick. Indeed he sent up a protesting whimper, rubbed himself against the dresser, and muttered protests in advance about waiting for his Auntie.

"There'll be no Auntie for you to wait," Felicity replied lifting the candle. "You must go to sleep with Peggy this night."

"No! I don't want Peggy."

"Well, you must want her, whether or not. Now, Peggy, come."

Mark ran across the kitchen and crouched under the table by the window. Felicity put down the candle, went after him and pulled him out by the skirts.

"Come!" she cried, hot with temper, "I'll begin as I'll end with you, my villain. Your Auntie is not come back to-night, so there for you, and if you are bad boy and not let Peggy

sleep with you, I'll murder—every bone—of—your—body! that I will and certain! . . . . Oh, you bad, bad boy making poor Felicity Robartch say what the Lord never meant her to mean! You bad, bad boy! But I *will*, mind me, as sure as breath is breathe in me. Begin cry, of course! Come on here, and no more devilments or you will see who is most of that, you or me!" she said tucking him under her arm like a sack and seizing the candle.

Mark kicked and struggled, and screamed; but Felicity entered the dark staircase and Peggy followed stamping on every stair in her distress.

Felicity marched him into Gwen's room and put him on the floor. Mark protested. Peggy protested. Mark would not sleep anywhere or with anybody. Peggy wanted to sleep as usual with Felicity. Felicity disregarded both and the children united their now hysterical demands.

"Auntie Gwen! Auntie Gwen!" cried Mark, "Oh, my Auntie Gwen!"

"Auntie Gwen!" cried Peggy.

"Well, you can't have your Aunties! You blarts! Both of you must sleep one with 'nother and no more cry about it. Should I stay with you till sleep come?"

"No—no—no! Auntie Gwen!" replied Mark running about the room searching for an opening.

"Well! Did eyes ever see the picture of such a determinations as that!" exclaimed Felicity, placing herself behind the door and watching him. "Oh you town-bred torments; no more all-days with *you!* What, what on earth—*and* in the heavens—do you want—rascal?"

"Auntie Gwen, Auntie Gwen!"

"I'll Auntie you, and Auntie too—leaving me like this with a half-English half-Welsh mongrel that has the deuce's own tempers in

him and out of him, too! Ugh! come here with you!" she said snatching him up.

Candle in hand she carried him off to her own room, Peggy following like a bleating twin lamb after a shepherd in charge of its mate. Felicity put down the candle and began to vigorously undress Mark. Mark dreaded a repetition of history, and called upon Peggy to save him; Peggy tried, but Felicity with a swing of her arm put Peggy down and pinned her to the floor by standing on her skirts; and on went the undressing of Mark until he stood stark naked.

At the sight of the rosy marks of her own fingers upon him, Felicity softened a little, she petted him and tried to coax him into his nightdress. For the sake of covering, Mark submitted; but once covered, he renewed the revolt. Felicity allowed him to run wild about the room while she took Peggy in hand. Peggy was easy to manage. Then she bun-

dled the two children into bed. It was like putting a storm to bed. The clothes rose in breakers; and then in a vast tidal wave flowed to the bottom of the bed, and Mark and Peggy went running about the room. Suddenly the window rattled as if hit with small shot. It was the sound of gravel.

Horror made Mark and Peggy stand still. Felicity put out the candle and whispered "*Hush!*" The rattling sound came to the window again, and they heard a lonely deep-voiced call.

The children crept to the bed and Felicity went to the window, which opened like a door. It was instantly splashed with gravel, and Felicity laughed. She slightly opened the window and spoke Welsh. The deep voice outside growled. As a fact it growled at Mark and Peggy—they were in the way. Felicity said something decisively, closed the window and latched it. Then the children

heard something placed against the wall outside and soon the low-toned voice came nearer. It was at the window in fact.

There was an urgent tapping; Felicity called out a decisive protest and "good-night." Still the deep voice and the knocking went on, and at last she opened the window again. There was a shuffle, Felicity gave a laughing scream, and Mark and Peggy heard a kiss. It intoxicated Felicity. She banged the window, reeled laughing to the bed, threw herself upon it without undressing, and in time fell asleep as she was.

After a long time huddling together Mark and Peggy also fell asleep. Mark has told me that in that strange half sleeping sleep he had a most vivid dream—a dream that left a kind of foretelling on all his consciousness next morning. He dreamt that he went up the stack yard, passed into the orchard at the back, walked up a path leading to the stile in the

hedge, mounted the stile—and, quite suddenly, found Auntie Gwen, coming home through a wood ; and Auntie Gwen was so glad that she put him to stand on a fallen tree, stooped with her back in front of him, drew him on her back, and gave him a ride all the way home.

CHAPTER X.

AN ADVENTURE.

MARK acted as his own interpreter of that dream. Immediately after his late breakfast he with faith in his own convincing consciousness went up the farm yard, passed into the orchard, and with much more difficulty than in the dream he climbed the stile and walked to the scanty skirts of a wood. It was in the wood proper where he had met Auntie Gwen in the dream and where he had once really been with her, so he ran along the wavy track leading to the closer trees. He ran until the track tapered into the grassy undergrowth of the shadowy wood, looking to the right and the left in search of the great big dream-tree where he had seen Auntie Gwen. But none

of the trees he came across were large and leafy and drooping enough; so on he went, over grass patches and through clusters of bracken.

At one place something started up from behind one of the clusters. It looked at Mark with its keen, sly, brown eyes, lifted its sharp nose and pricked its sharp ears, and then made off sweeping the ferns with its heavy brush. Mark thought the fox from the parlour had followed him and he staggered helpless; then he ran in another direction; ran until he tripped over a bramble branch and came to grief on all fours. Before he rose a squirrel leapt in front of him from the ground to the trunk of an oak. It leapt like madness on springs from branch to branch and he believed the fox had made itself smaller to tease him. He was afraid. He would go back: but strayed into thicker underwood, and darker overwood; he went by tufts and mounds over spongy masses of moss; by rotted trunks embossed with lichen and

feathered with fern; over springing brown spaces fragrant with pine-needles and cones; under aerial birches to the rustle of leaves then beginning to fall; down grassy hollows and up inclines thick with brambles and honeysuckle, and under the deeper dusk of closer trees.

On, on he went, panting, musing, muttering and murmuring, until the clap-like flap of wings and the flutter and flight of a pair of pigeons from their nest in a flat-topped fir, made him stand aghast. He looked for an exit. To the right and left was impenetrable wood; to the front and back was wood; above him was wood waving and rustling—all hemming him in with a whining howl, for a strong wind had risen. He did not exactly cry; but, as Mark under cross-examination said, he got ready for it, especially when the place became suddenly dark. The darkness came through the trees, down into the wood, and with it the

drip and rustle of big rain and the rumble of thunder over the trees and among them. The rain pattered as if the drops were racing, and he crouched into a hollow between the rabbit burrowed earth and the long arms of some brambles. The place became like midnight, for he was in a wood within a wood; but, dark as it was, a flash of lightning found him out and made the bramble bush dazzle and the whole wood like white flame.

The wind howled far and near, the trees waved and creaked, the thunder exploded in mid-air and shook the ground. A rabbit scampered under the bramble bush for its burrow; but seeing Mark it stopped short, sat on its haunches for an instant, and inspected him. Scarcely had the creature bobbed the white of its tail to run when—flash! descended the lightning in front of him; and Mark next saw the rabbit scorched out of its ordinary shape and dead. The thunder rattled in the

wind and the wind howled. The whole wood moved, top and bottom. Trunks crashed, branches ground each other, creaked and snapped; pines fell like long solid thunderbolts and lifted the earth with their roots; bushes lashed each other, while the sodding drip of a deluging rain lashed everything that was above the ground. The whole world seemed to be sobbing, and Mark, as part of it, sobbed too. He curled himself into a ball with his mouth packed with pinafore and felt himself breathing hot air into his palms. He says that up to then, as far as he knows, he had never heard of the world coming to an end, but while he was sobbing with the breaking-up world about him that idea came to him—and he wished himself at home, at his real home, at his father's and mother's home in Liverpool: as if, forsooth, that were a local habitation that could never come to an end.

A shimmer of sunbeams moved along the

trailing branches of the bramble in front of him, and spread to others. Great spots dropped from the trees and every waft of wind sent down a shower, but the sun pierced through and made the wood like a raindrop fairyland.

Mark ventured out of the hole and found himself surrounded by trees that had fallen crosswise and in heaps. He was beset on every side by interlacing trunks, branches, and leaves, as if the top of the wood had been lowered to the ground. He could neither creep under nor over, and sat on a trunk. He became hungry, and thought of his dinner; and then as if he had had dinner he thought of his tea. In that hour even Felicity was idealized. He was sure he could love her—if she only brought him something to eat.

He made efforts to liberate himself, but he was blocked in on all sides and the sun sank, shedding a wild quivering golden light even

into his prison of trunks, branches, and leaves. He called aloud, "Auntie Gwen! Auntie Gwen!"—but the sky darkened into an indigo blue until the half moon rose big and coppery, climbing the sky as if to look at him; and the stars, following its example, stared at him. The wood became as still and silent as if the storm had killed it, and as if the night was its tomb.

In that dead calm he himself seemed to die: he swooned to sleep and dreamt the most strange things about terrible Felicity. She was part cow, part cat, part woman—the fore-part cow and the hind-part cat. Each of the four legs had her skirts on and the neck was dressed with her bodice. The cow-cat-woman went howling and bellowing about the kitchen, up the stairs, through the dairy, into the farm-yard. All the other cows and cats about the place came out to see it, and they bellowed and howled, and the cow-cat-woman bellowed

and howled in return, wondering what was to do with them and what was to do with itself. The horns dropped off, the head dropped off, the two eyes came out of the head and hopped about like birds, the legs dropped off and danced about with the skirts, and the tail stood on end beating and waving time.

Mark says he then awoke, but instead of seeing such pranks he simply saw the bramble bush before him and daylight. He heard some distant crows caw, and a bird on his own bramble bush chirp. He moved to creep out and in going through the entrance a spider's large round web completely netted his face, and the spider itself, as if Mark were a bigger insect than it had ever trapped before, ran about his face bewildered.

Sweeping this off, he stood in the open again and heard the buzz and hum of insects. He heard something more: Auntie Gwen called, "Mark? Mark!" from the air. He

looked around and up. He saw her on the branch of a tree, and he danced wild with relief.

Gwen was not long dismounting and forcing a way through the barrier of branches and leaves; and wet, torn, distressed and wearied, she took him like a bundle of wet shreds and patches into her arms, kissed and hugged him in her own passionate way, called out to Felicity and others that the lad was safe, and took him home to the best breakfast he had ever had.

CHAPTER XI.

WELSH COURTING.

When an Indian youth wishes to woo an Indian maiden for his bride, he leaves his father's wigwam at night, steals into the wigwam where his loved one sleeps, and reclines at her feet awaiting her favourable recognition.

In Mark's time some Welsh courting was done on much the same principle; and hence this chapter of accidents.

Felicity had a "follower"—Tam Williams, employed at Ty-Cremed. Auntie Gwen, quite against her own wishes, also had one—Elias Lewis, the son on the next farm: a tall, well-built, beardless young farmer of twenty-five, but with thin lips, small bead-like eyes, a nose

almost as keen in its edge as a paper knife, and straight black hair. He was determined, and for a farmer, dressy, with a partiality for knee breeches.

Felicity encouraged Tam far more than Gwen liked, for in the mornings Tam was very late harnessing his horses and Felicity was sometimes too drowsy to buckle her shoes. Gwen, on the other hand, emphatically discouraged Elias Lewis, and once in Mark's hearing told him to keep on his own side of the hedge.

One night when Gwen and Mark were gently dozing to sleep, Gwen alertly turned the clothes from her ear and listened. Soil was splashed against the window panes. Was it someone from Bryn-nant?—news about Iwan? She swerved out of bed and went to the window.

News about Iwan? It was that Elias Lewis! The sandy splash came to the win-

dow again. Gwen was roused to indignation. Was the son of a well-to-do farmer, a master, mean enough to use the vulgar tactics of some of the farm servants with—her? She muttered her passionate disgust.

There was another splash of sand. In a moment the blind was lifted, the door-like window was opened, and the water-jug was emptied as near as possible on Elias's head; on second thoughts, for the sake of noise, the jug itself was smashed to atoms on the boulder pavement in front of the house, and on third thoughts, the basin followed.

"That will cool him; and warm him too," muttered Gwen trembling. She shut the window, drew the blind, and returned to bed; Mark and Gwen heard Elias Lewis tramp across the farm yard to go back home.

Next night, however, he tried again. He pelted the window twice; but Gwen paid no attention and he went away. He repeated the

operation the third night, but with a similar result. His insults, however, galled Gwen. She resolved to stop them. On the following night she stayed up much later than usual and found Felicity something to do in the back kitchen. She stayed up in fact until a sound was heard outside. Assuring herself of Elias Lewis by running upstairs and peeping through her window, Gwen left a light in the bed-room.

"Felicity Robartch," she said, at the last moment when they were ready to go upstairs, "I'll sleep in the back room to-night—*you* go to mine. I haven't slept there very well for the past two nights."

"Very well, missis," said Felicity, "if you're wishing it. Very well; and will Mark go with you or with me?"

"With Auntie of course," was Gwen's reply.

Mark and Gwen went to Felicity's room at the back.

Scarcely had they settled into warmth when

a handful of gravel against the panes made Mark jump. He threw the clothes off with a cry. Then came another splash ; and another. This was strange. How did Elias Lewis know the change? Gwen sat up for awhile, listening. A beautiful moonlight illumined the window blind.

"Mark," she whispered, "you'll promise me to be good? You won't cry or shout or move whatever happens?—and we'll go for a drive with Madam to-morrow."

Mark promised and Gwen went to the window and peeped.

It was not Elias Lewis, but her own "hand," Tam Williams. Even while she stood there in the semi-darkness another fling of gravel came like shot. Gwen considered. She decided what to do. She put her hand under the blind, withdrew the catch, gave a few taps of invitation ; and quickly began to dress without a light. Mark shortly heard,

what he had heard once before—the ladder placed against the wall and a knock at the window. He also heard again the low-toned voice of Tam Williams. Gwen finishing her dressing, and returning to the bed, whispered —"Aye, it's Tam! Quiet; there's a good boy!" They saw Tam's big head at the window. They saw him open the lattice and raise his large body halfway through. Quiet as rabbits were they. He pushed the blind before him; came through, and stepped on the floor in his stocking feet.

When he had closed the window, Gwen called from her dusky quarters to him in the moonlight,

"Tam Williams!"

Tam shot bolt upright against the moon-lit blind.

"Isn't it 'Licity Robartch?" he asked.

"No, it isn't 'Licity Robartch," said Gwen advancing. "What do you mean, sir?"

"Duwcs Anwyl, mistress! Indeed, indeed, mam, it is *too* bad of me; too bad! but can you tell me if you please—eh—can you tell me, mam, what time Felicity Robartch will be up early in the morning, first thing? I want —eh—I want to—well, mam, my stockings is want mend, my heel is go barefoot, and I thought 'Licity Robartch would mend 'em almost on my foot while I wait. Indeed truth 'm."

"I'll truth you," replied Gwen seeking a light.

"Yes *in*deed! believe me or not, 'm, now or never. And now that I remind me, I was want to see you too, missis, early 'fore morning, about those turnips pass the orchard grass field, 'm. They're—"

"No doubt they are asleep by this and not walking into each other's rows," retorted Gwen, vigorously striking a light. "Never you mind the turnips. Go home and don't make

yourself like a villain and a thief, again. See," said Gwen pointing to a gun hanging on the wall over the fireplace, "*that* is more to the point than turnips at this hour."

"Duck-gun?" muttered Tam amazed.

"And goose-gun too, if you come with your wild chase here," broke in Gwen.

He retreated towards the window.

"Here, this way!" said Gwen fancying she heard a sound elsewhere, and he stepped forward eager to obey. Hastily thinking of her next move, she happened to look at his stockings as he stepped within range of the candle which Gwen held, and Tam at once appealed with as much pathos as possible.

"Indeed 'm you can see with the candle and your own eye yourself whether I'm not walk in barefoot or not—and I thought 'Licity Robartch would darn 'em while I wait; but darn and dang me double, mam, if ever I do the like of this again!"

"Come; no more!" replied Gwen sharply, and with a glance at Mark she stepped lightly to the door of the room, as if to guard it. She was now sure that she had heard something elsewhere.

"Tam Williams!" she called like a general, with the brass candlestick in one hand while she lifted the other and stood as straight as a sentinel.

"Missis?" exclaimed Tam, asking to what awful doom she was about to condemn him.

"Don't stir; stay here!" was Gwen's curt reply.

"Yes 'm," he said relieved, and fixed himself until she should set him free.

Gwen very quietly opened the door and closed it after her. She soon returned with a resolute gleam of daring in her eyes.

"This way, sir!" she whispered, "and no noise—do you hear?—wakening everybody!"

Gwen, candle in hand, led the man from

darkness to darkness until she reached the front bed-room door. Her hand passionately lifted the latch and straight into the dark room she walked, followed by Tam, almost before Felicity, who was dressed, sitting on the side of the bed, had time to scream; and before Elias Lewis, who was standing about three yards away as if he had been turned to stone while passing between the window and the bed, had time to move.

For the first time recognizing Felicity by the light of Gwen's candle, Elias Lewis uttered oaths, snapped his finger and thumb, and bent his head; and Tam stood confounded between the smartness of Gwen and the apparent villainy of Elias Lewis and of his own Felicity, who was in great distress with her face in her gown.

"Confound it, Elias Lewis, it's too much! —too much!"—and Tam bounced in his stockings like a ball, and "let" in a feverish

fighting attitude immediately opposite Elias, who was also enduring the indignity of standing in his hose.

"Hold—hold!" cried Gwen thrusting the candle between them as if to singe Tam's young beard. Tam bounced back; but with the white of his eyes and the clench of his fist, he swore vengeance.

'Really, missis, I may be fool; but I am not villain—no, *not* villain! I'm sure shirtin of that, and there is gospels I would sware on it. Fool p'raps; but villain, *no!*—but look you here, 'Licity Robartch!"

Felicity hid her face more and rolled over in a half reclining attitude with her distressed head on the pillow.

Elias Lewis was too obstinate to speak. He seemed inclined to jump through the window.

"Well, *gentlemen*, when you are ready," said Gwen.

Both were eager to go.

"I don't see why I should honour you with stairs—go as you came, please," and she stepped forward, opened the gate-like lattice, and indicated that she was ready to say good-night to Elias Lewis first.

Frowning and shewing his teeth he worked himself through the window, while Gwen stood a little aside, and he descended the ladder. When on the ground he wildly withdrew the ladder and let it fall with a crash, and made off. Gwen, hearing the crash and seeing the situation at a glance, laughed and closed the window.

"Come," she said, "*you* shall have the stairs," and shewed him through the room door, while Felicity still hid her face on the pillow.

"Did she *speak*, missis?" anxiously asked Tam going down the staircase.

"Take care Nelson doesn't speak to your calf," replied Gwen.

"Bless me, missis!—call him to make him know you, or come you first—*please.*"

"Get on with you! He must be as deaf as water to let two men get in the house without a bark."

Quite as if resenting that reproach, Nelson gave a dreamy bark, on the kitchen side of the closed door at the foot of the stairs, and Tam muttered—"Please, missis, *please.*"

"Open the door!" said Gwen, "he won't touch you; most is the pity."

Tam lifted the latch and Gwen commanded Nelson to "Lie down."

As Nelson was already lying down, it was a command he obeyed without a move. Tam opened the stairs door, and in the dark stepped on Nelson's tail. The dog rose with such urgency that he tripped Tam, who fell like a corn sack into the staircase. In the very nick of time he bumped his head on the very stair to which Gwen was in the act of descending.

She actually stepped on poor Tam's long hair; but she was no sooner on than she was off again, for Tam, like Nelson, moved with such urgency that he tripped her. She fell over on her left side, the candle stabbed the wall and went out, and Gwen was full length on the stairs in the dark. She was not hurt; in fact she was very much amused.

"Are you fall, missis?" Tam asked, but she did not speak. The collapse indeed gave her excited humour a touch of wickedness. "Are you *fall?* Where can I pick you up, missis? Are you hurt—are you dead or 'live! For goodness speak, mam, and doan't keep me at death's door in the darkness like this! Bless me!—She is stiff, straight as nail! 'Licity Robartch! 'Licity Robartch! Mistress has fall. *Here* is mischief! *Here* is mischief! Down, Nelson—*down*, you demond; and me with no brimstone match in my pocket! 'Licity Robartch! why stick she up there with her

cry when there is plenty for it to do down here!"

A titter from Gwen settled Tam's distress.

"*Oh*, mistress, *mistress!* It is too bad of you to give one sweats like this! I thought I was hang at the 'sizes for you. Thank the stars for my poor neck to die respectable!"

Gwen found a match on the stairs. She despatched Tam through the front door as seriously as if he had that moment come through the bed-room window; and returned to Mark, who was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MARKET DAY.

By some means a version of the incident travelled out of the bed-rooms of Ty-Cremed down the farm lane, along the main road, past the little white chapel, under the plumes of the fir trees, and the ivied branches of the oaks and birches, and away up the steep high street of Denbigh on Market day.

The version seemed to have been communicated to the town rather than to a person, for while everybody knew of it, nobody knew how. If you turned into the tap-room of the Cross Keys, or of the King's Arms, or the Hawk and Buckle, it was there. It seemed to be in every glass of beer of the young men, in every half glass of whiskey of the old men, in every

"drop of gin hot and sweet" of the old ladies, and even in the glass of port wine of the farmer's daughter who "had to have 'something'" for the sake of the comfort of sitting in a cosy room either at mid-day or for half an hour at the close of the market.

The story was at the counter of every druggist shop, at every grocer's, every draper's; in carts, and on ponies and donkeys; wherever there was a man or woman, there was the twinkle over the latest good thing. Even the policeman dangling his short ash-plant at the ecclesiastical looking market entrance had a relaxed smile of enjoyable knowledge. Inside the market the story had been told and re-told over the cutting and jointing of many a quarter of Welsh mutton, and over the sale of Welsh homespun, small wares, and groceries. Further in the market still, in the cool fragrant butter department exclusively occupied by shawled women, young and old, the story

travelled by whispers and winks from head to head and group to group.

Gwen was not long at her slate slab where her maid stood awaiting the regular customers for her well-known make of butter, before she realized that she was the heroine of the day. Far more than the usual customers crowded about her and the wicker-basket with its snow-white cloth and round pounds of butter with their acorn print in high relief. In fact from morning until noon she held a compulsory reception to receive the congratulations of those women who accepted the facts, to convince those who could not believe them; and especially to modify the versions of the many who took an intense delight in making a good thing better by adding to what they had heard something spicier which they imagined. Those romancists very much hurt Gwen. The blood rushed to her face, a flash gleamed in her eye, as she resented the exaggerated versions of

what after all were very simple, innocent facts.

If one hostel in Denbigh had the story in a more intensified degree of hilarity than another, it was the Hawk and Buckle in High Street, for all the characters of the tragi-comedy usually made that their place of call either for the mid-day market dinner or before starting for home.

There were indications of this intense hilarity at the Hawk and Buckle during the mid-day dinner, at which about twenty hearty people of both sexes sat at a long table under the chairmanship of the host, and, as it happened, the vice-chairmanship of Elias Lewis himself.

Gwen was not there, but she heard that Elias Lewis was so taunted and joked up the table, down the table, and across the table, and particularly by Darve of Bryn-nant, that before all the guests were served, Elias Lewis

stuck his fork into the leg of mutton, threw the knife into the dish, snatched up his hat, and walked out of the room like a war-horse. Farmer laughed with farmer, and wife with wife; the long room rippled with reiterated Welsh, Darve clapped his hands and knees, and there was an immediate call for the dinner beer.

That incident also found its way up the High Street, into the market, and from there to the bar parlour of every hostel; and poor Elias was the subject of renewed banter.

Gwen sold out her butter earlier than usual that afternoon, and arranged with Felicity to get down to the Hawk and Buckle and have the trap ready quite an hour before the customary time, so as to avoid further demonstrations during the general exodus. Gwen, however, was delayed at the grocer's, and at last hastening off, she turned down the High Street. She saw Nain opposite a draper's window.

"And where are you in such haste?" asked Nain.

"Home, Nain bach."

"Aye, aye, indeed; and wise, from what I hear."

"And you, Nain?"

"Well, I was in my thoughts, Gwen; I was consider whether flannel red or white would be best. The poor lad is cough so. He fair make me cough for him 'tis so hard with him. Red, I am thinking is more warm, and look warmer; though, indeed, girl, I am grieved in my heart to get it, for that is the colour he is begin to spit."

"Nain? Nain!" cried Gwen, her young face wrinkling with pain.

"There I am!" confessed Nain. "He ask me not to tell, and I have give it you free as a cock with its crow! But do not pretend, Gwen, my girl, when you see him; though indeed nobody hates lie more than Nain does;

but may be the Lord be willing to pass this one as good as truth seeing as He was consid'rate to the sick Himself."

"Never you mind," said Gwen. "Never you mind about telling me, Nain, I should soon learn it—poor lad! Red flannel you think?"

"Well, that is my puzzle this minute, girl. I would not grieve his eye for the world; and to speak truth I fear to think I see red on him myself, though it is like a fool's suspicions if it is best for him. Red after all, I *think*. My poor Iwan!" exclaimed Nain. "I think I lose him bit by bit, day by day, now. He want to *speak* less, and that is hard when the time for talk is come less and less. And what think you, Gwen, my girl, how he speaks when he does speak?—but there, my pet, *don't, don't*, though I can't help cry myself when I think twenty-five and to go! But if it is the Lord's will I must be willing too—

willing too—though it is hard and strange willingness to want the other way. But it is beautiful when I think, and I am wanting to tell you—beautiful, indeed, my girl—it is not a word of English from him now; what small bit he speak is come from him *Welsh*, so sweet and gentle, as if he want to go to heaven from Wales. And I think of his dear father who was so proud of the mountains as he never would utter one word about them but in their own tongue of Clewyd. But I am talk, *and* talk; and talk will not buy flannel or get you home," said Nain stepping to the shop door.

"I'll get it for you," said Gwen, to save Nain pushing through the crowded customers.

"Well, indeed girl, I be glad to wait here; people ask such questionings and I am not in mind for it with only sickness to tell them. A yard and half—thick—woolly—warm—

none of your thin, like draper's paper, and through in single wash ;—and white, my lass, whatever."

Gwen had to wait some time.

Nain put down her basket and parcel on the pavement under the window, and stood musing with her hands before her. The re-appearance of Gwen roused her. She took Gwen's hand and the parcel between both of hers, and paused a moment. A solemn look passed over the whole of her fine old face and fixed on her dusky brow, like a cloud-shadow on a wood.

"For goodness sake, my girl," she said in a low persuasive tone, and casting her black eyes around to see that she was not overheard, "For goodness sake, my *dear* girl, don't have no more bother with that Elias Lewis. I have been want to tell you ; he has a cranky humours ; and always was from a child."

"I *have* nothing to do with him, Nain ;

and I *want* nothing," said Gwen, "but he must leave me alone."

"Don't pretend that you notice; and he will tire 'fore you."

"But when he comes into the house, Nain?"

"Well, that—that *is*—mean,—it's bit awkward *that*; but take you no notice so far, my girl, for if there is bother between you, our Darve says he will come and shake him by the neck like a rat-terrier—and, goodness bless us, our Darve would kill the man, as sure as life; —and our Iwan so ill. 'Tis quiet we want. So close your eye to his foolishness. But indeed, indeed, I must go. Bet waits for me on the Pontrufidd Road. Good-night, my *dear* girl, and come you soon. He is so glad of it; glad, poor lad. Good-night. And get *you* home, my Gwen. Nos dda i chwi! (Good-night to you!)"

"Good-night," answered Gwen, hardly

thinking of what she was saying as Nain moved away.

Gwen stood at the shop window confused. She could not at once recall the direction she was going when she met Nain. Her thought followed the tall straight old woman in her loose dark gown and grey woollen shawl, descending with firm careful step the steep High Street of Denbigh. Step by step the grey figure went further and further away; and Gwen still stood—watching, dreaming, and wondering, and very sad. An idea roused her. She at once entered the shop, bought three tea cakes and hastened after Nain, who was by this near the bottom of the street.

"Oh, my Gwennie Gwen-Gwen!" murmured Nain with tremulous solicitude. "My Gwennie Gwen-Gwen? I did not mean to bring your tears when I spoke advice—"

"I know; I know, Nain. It isn't that.

Should I come with you? Is Iwan *so* bad?"

"Consid'rate, good-hearted one!" muttered Nain in Welsh. "Indeed, my dear girl, he *is* bad; but you must get you home to-night. Come you to-morrow, or the next. Market day is wanting you at home, I know. And what is this, my child?"

"Only a taste for you and Iwan, Nain."

"Oh, bless you, bless you, Gwen! It is only grieve me that he is want such gentle meat."

Nain put forward her face with her lips pursed ready to kiss, her hands being occupied with her baskets and parcels. Gwen put her arms around Nain's neck and kissed her on both cheeks.

"Then good-night again, my Gwennie; and God bless us, for indeed we both want it this minute. And get you to home; get you

to home, my girl; and good-night to you"—and they parted.

Gwen reclimbed the steep street to keep her appointment with Felicity Robartch at the Hawk and Buckle.

CHAPTER XIII.

IF NOT FRIENDS—FOES THEN.

At the arched entrance to the Hawk and Buckle was an old school companion of Gwen's, lavishly attired in the fulsome style of the day—a wide-brimmed cream-coloured straw hat, with an ostrich feather; a loose brown silk dress, with rippling flounces like water-falls, increasing in circumference and in "fall" from her knees to her feet; and a loosely-fitting velvet jacket made especially spruce, by lines upon lines of narrow braiding about the wrists and the borders, and bright black satin buttons. The young lady was fair, tall, and vivacious, and the school companions had not seen each other for four years.

"Gwen?"

"Winnie?" they exclaimed, and a mingling of two heads and four arms under the broad-brimmed straw hat, took place.

"I've often thought of you," said Winnie.

"And I of you," said Gwen.

"Mother and I are on our way to Ruthin. She is resting, come and see her."

"I was coming for my gig," said Gwen.

"Here to the Hawk and Buckle?"

"Yes."

"Let us go in then. Mother will be delighted. She used to say a look at you had more in it than a day's talk with others. She always said that."

The friends moved arm in arm into the archway.

"Are you married yet, Gwen?" asked Winnie, laughing, and coming to a stand.

"N—o. And you?"

"Six days to-morrow and I shall be. Why *you* used to have hosts of sweethearts at

school—you remember?—at least you called them yours. But what became of your cousin —Iwan or Ewan, I think it was? . . . . Oh, Gwen! I did not mean to hurt you! he's not married, is he?"

"N—o. No, dear fellow. . . . . I will see your mother and be off. It is late."

"No hurry," said Winnie.

"A great hurry," answered Gwen, "I want to go home and then round to Bryn-nant."

They passed under the arch and entered the hostel. Opposite the door was the landlord's cozy little windowed office where he presided over the big brown jugs of home-brewed beer. To the left of the office was the plain bar parlour with its sanded floor; and it was to the parlour that Winnie and Gwen went.

The little room was full. Farmers and several farmers' wives and daughters were sitting at tables around three of the walls, and as

the two young women entered, the buzz of conversation ceased. It was a surprise, one or two even clapped hands, and one genial old farmer with his rough dark beaver hat on one side, and his hand on his glass called in Welsh —"Bravo! Give me a young woman of spirit! Here's to her, my men; you know what I mean."

"Bravo!" "Good!" "Here's to her!" were the replies, and most of the glasses were lifted.

Gwen attempted to retreat, but a woman dressed in a style which corresponded with Winnie's, instantly greeted her. It was Winnie's mother. Between the two, Gwen was practically pushed into a chair near the door, there she was warmly welcomed as an old friend, and at once invited to have a glass of port wine. Gwen shook her head and glanced around the room. She caught sight of Elias Lewis almost opposite, and whispered an ardent wish

to retire; but Winnie's mother to the right and Winnie to the left, would not heed what at last became an appeal.

Just then the bell-rope hanging in the centre of the room was pulled by Elias Lewis, who stared at Gwen as he backed to his seat. Gwen shuddered under the gaze, her warm radiant face looked as if the blood beneath were going white and thin, and an unusual blankness came to her blue eyes.

The landlord entered and took orders. When he returned and retired again, Gwen found that she had two glasses of port wine before her. She was puzzled. Winnie's mother admitted ordering one; Elias Lewis ostentatiously claimed the honour of having ordered the other.

It was an odd, half-defiant proceeding. The men and women looked at each other and muttered.

The only one to speak out was Darve, and

his voice rang loud above the rest as he called across the room :

"Elias Lewis! But you have a great bare-face to order drink where it isn't want."

"I'll not go all around to Bryn-nant to ask permission," replied the other with a sneer.

Gwen trembled. She thought of Nain, of Iwan, and of peace.

"But if you won't come to Bryn-nant," said Darve, passionately taking off his hat, and banging it on the table, "one of Bryn-nant will come to you—yes, be-hang me, *now*, if you are in partic'lar hurry, with your impidence!"

That was too much for Gwen, and ignoring all in the room except Elias Lewis she walked to where he was sitting.

Every eye followed her. She held the glass of wine which he had ordered, in her left hand, and with appealing conciliation she said, "Come, let us be friends," and offered her hand.

Elias Lewis was taken by surprise. Gwen invitingly extended her hand a little nearer.

With the sneer of a man too soon submitted to, he put both hands into his trousers' pockets.

Strong words of contempt passed round, but as Gwen still stood with her hand extended, nobody moved; not even Darve.

"Let us be friends," repeated Gwen and re-offered her hand.

He thrust his hands deeper into his pockets, and a snarl came to his face.

"By the deuce!" roared Darve, taking up a position by Gwen's side, "Take you her hand or I'll put a double head on you and lift the grins off your face." Elias was stubborn. "Oh! you cacyneu!" (wasp) growled Darve, and taking Gwen's hand that held the glass into his, he dashed the wine full on Elias' fresh sneer, saying, "If not friends—'tis foes then!"

"Bravo!" "Well done." "Serve him right." "Did you ever see the likes to that?" "He deserves it." "As good as gold, Darve Wynn," the company called, "As good as gold!"

Elias Lewis's wits seemed to be shocked out of him. He looked idiotic with his eyes staring, his lips apart, the red wine trickling down his face and dripping off his chin. A roar of laughter and the stampede of the women restored his wits; but in a very excited condition. He muttered an oath and sprang to his feet, whereupon Darve and another man seized him. Gwen wanted to stay to keep Darve's fists down, but Winnie, her mother and the other women would not let her.

They took charge of her and hustled her into the kitchen beyond the Tap, and through that into the Inn yard where Felicity had the gig ready. They all begged Gwen to mount

and to drive off; but she would not. Only for the superior force of the women she would have returned to the uproar in the parlour, for she shuddered at every thought of Darve; and when he came, as he thought, as satisfactory evidence that *he* was perfectly safe, somewhat to his disgust she said:

"But, Darve, you did not strike Elias? You did not hurt him?"

"Oh girl!—You make me wish to the blessed heavens I had!" said Darve, and turned on his heel. Then relenting he turned again, saw Gwen mount her gig and bade her and Felicity "Good-night."

CHAPTER XIV.

CASTING OUT THE DEVIL.

THE Sundays at the farm were a great mystery to Mark. All the gates were shut, the cows were quiet, the horses had nothing to do but eat in the stables, and the men lolled about as if waiting for Monday. To add to the mystery Mark was taken by Auntie Gwen to "Capel" on the Denbigh road. It was really a Chapel-of-ease for the convenience of those who could not go to town, and that service was usually conducted by Abram Rees, a local preacher, who acted as keeper of the Chapel and worked on Gwen's farm as a general handy man. Gwen provided Abram Rees with material comforts on six days of the week ; and he provided her with spiritual

comfort on the Sabbath. During the week she could order him about with secular determination ; but on Sundays, under the influence of his long and touching prayers, she knelt before him, the most submissive of creatures.

Outwardly the chapel was a little white cottage, but the inside had been cleared of all domestic associations and fitted like a workbox, with plain wood compartments of various sizes for pews, with an extra and elevated compartment let-into where the chimney had once been, for the pulpit. Beneath the pulpit was a small square space formed by the front pews, fitted with seats. That was where the Elder sat, and where the afternoon "class" gathered, the white mud floor being worn into hollows near the seats and towards the centre, by the friction of the feet.

On the Sunday following the eventful Market day Gwen went to Chapel as usual.

At first she shrank from the idea in case Elias Lewis might be there—but in an instant it seemed that that was the very reason why she should go; to show that she was not afraid.

Elias Lewis was anything but a regular attendant, but he was there that day in a spirit of defiance; and Darve, a more irregular attendant still, was also there, looking far more ready for a friendly fight than for prayer. Darve sat in the front pew on the right of the pulpit, and opposite Gwen's; while Elias Lewis was boxed in the front pew opposite the pulpit with only a few yards between him and Darve, or Gwen.

Darve was flushed and in excellent humour; but Elias Lewis looked pale, ill-tempered and unforgiving.

Nothing eventful occurred during the Service, but when Abram Rees selected as the subject of his discourse The Casting out of

Devils, Darve quite forgot himself, and looked inferentially at Elias Lewis as if a capital joke had just been told. A smile beginning at Darve's pew travelled from pew to pew and even into the pew where Elias Lewis sat; but it did not travel to him: he sat like a pallid effigy untouched by the magnetism that was increasing the colour and brightening the eyes in all the faces around.

Gwen pitied Elias Lewis, and as slyly as she could signalled to Darve with a slight frown. At that Darve affected to convulse with laughter and ducked his head in the pew. When he looked up again it was with an assumed solemn gaze of attention at the preacher. But it was a palpable pretence. It was a gaze with such a roguish flashing twinkle at its corners that Gwen had to forswear looking that way.

That Sunday Abram was unusually eloquent in his earnest, florid, and yet homely

way, and he had not been preaching long before the twinkle disappeared out of Darve's gaze, and Elias Lewis sat keenly concerned in every word. There was nothing directly personal in the discourse; but indirectly it was very personal indeed. He was warm and sincere; he spoke appealingly. Sometimes he leaned out of the pulpit and asked a question and paused for a response, and the little Chapel filled with sighs and the moan of some old man, while the fine old women bent their heads and wiped their eyes.

With a searching glance from pew to pew, to the right, to the left, and in front of him, he declared that everybody had a devil which wanted casting out—some had the devil of lust, some the devil of revenge, some the devil of impatience, some the devil of spite, and some the devil of defiance. All these wanted casting out, and they could only be cast out by every creature opening the heart to the

spirit of love and forgiveness. This was at close quarters. Darve slyly knuckled his eye; the colour of shame rose to Elias Lewis's high cheek bones; Gwen's eyes frankly sparkled with reconciliation, and all in the little Chapel were touched with a feeling of peace.

The hymn following the discourse was sung with a piercing sincerity, Gwen's voice rising like a penetrating thrill through the quieter tones of the men. After the hymn every head was willingly bowed during one of the longest prayers Abram Rees ever delivered, but the fervour of his appeal to God, to woman, and to man, to cast every devil from every soul in that little place before they breathed the generous air of autumn outside, made it appear short; and when he closed many a head remained bowed on its handkerchief a few moments longer than usual.

The Chapel soon emptied, and Gwen, Darve, and Mark stood on the road a few minutes at the point where Darve had to make for Bryn-nant. They did not refer to Elias Lewis. Gwen asked after Iwan, Nain, and Bet; Darve tried to be playful with Mark, but could not; and after a few rapid, awkward words about Abram's sermon, Darve went on his way.

Gwen was soon on her way home, quieter than usual, and with Mark at her side. She had not gone far before she was overtaken. It was Elias Lewis. Approaching her, he said frankly:

"If not too late, I would like to shake hands."

Gwen's response was so ready, so frank, that he could hardly believe that he held her hand.

"Thank you—thank you, Miss Gwinell! Not foes then, now?"

Gwen, in the flush of ready forgiveness, looked up at him; then bowed her head, saying:

"No, no, Mr. Lewis."

His face coloured, his eyes brightened, a gentler expression softened his hard features: he wanted to say more, but could not. Gratitude confounded him. It confounded Gwen. As the tears threatened her eyes, she seemed to herself to weep the very wine that had been cast in this man's face. And yet in another instant her hand was withdrawn with a subtle intimation in its passionless slackening that she could go no further than that.

With convictions like hot steels in him he felt that his was a love without love. He was doomed to lose her. He had not the supreme quality that would win her. He felt it in her hand; he saw it in her eyes; yes, her very tears were his discharge.

When he turned away and mounted a stile,

he had the look of having the curse and not the blessing of love.

Gwen moved homeward with Mark. She took Mark's hand. She thought of sick Iwan. She had thought of him even while her hand was in Elias Lewis's. If poor Iwan knew the strife she was being put through! She almost wished that he did: she was so loyal. Loyal? As loyal as love itself; and she halted, stooped and half-kneeling she kissed Iwan through his likeness, Mark.

CHAPTER XV.

WORD FROM BRYN-NANT.

A WEEK passed. On the following Sunday afternoon Gwen sat opposite the kitchen fire with her feet on the fender, her dress skirt drawn up over her knees, and leaning forward on her elbows. There were some hazel-nuts on her lap, but she did not heed them. She simply sat gazing at the fire.

Mark had slyly emigrated to the pond with bread for the ducks.

At the pond he discovered quite a new thing in ducks. He had parted with most of his bread, when, to his surprise, one of the birds sailed to the edge of the pond, waddled a little up the bank, and extended its neck in the direction of his palm. Mark opened his

hand, the duck freely accepted the invitation and began to guzzle the crumbs. A wild idea came—he made a grab—and he found the duck's head in his hand. He was so surprised by his miraculous dexterity that he forgot how to leave go, and instead of slackening, he tightened. The duck gave a number of quick gurgling quacks as much as to say, but with far more graphic phraseology—

"Here! That's enough! Let go. It isn't fair!"

But Mark didn't let go; and the duck appeared to explode with a tremendous flap of both wings. All the other ducks rose to their feet in the water, and quacked and flapped their surprise. Mark quite as miraculously as he had done it, undid it, and away went the duck testing its ruffled neck, and trimming its feathers, to mutual quacks of congratulation all over the pond—whereupon, as dexterously as Mark had surprised the duck,

Mark was surprised by Felicity. She seized him by the skirts of his Sunday clothes from behind, whirled him under her arm, and carried him to the back kitchen, the back way. His clothes were muddy, and his hands and face were mottled with splashes of dirty water, though Felicity had not long before made him "as clean as a new pin." In that back kitchen, with all the doors closed, he was washed as he had never been washed before, as he has never been washed since, and, so he tells me, as he hopes never to be washed again. Felicity scolded him for being so naughty, so cruel to Auntie. He was to go and keep Auntie company and to be good and kind; and taking him to the front-kitchen door, she opened it and pushed him in.

Auntie Gwen was still sitting with her feet on the fender, and her dress skirt drawn up; she was still leaning forward on her elbows,

and she had a limp damp handkerchief in her hand, and another on her lap.

Mark approached. He placed his arm on the back of her chair; but Gwen, beyond muttering into her handkerchief, "Well, Mark?" took no notice. He stood there in inactive attendance for some time, but wearying of doing nothing and of having nothing said to him, and not being able to enter into a foreign emotion, half in protest he went to the oak dresser and began lifting the brass handles, two at a time, just to hear them fall into their slots.

"Don't, Mark dear," appealed Gwen, without looking round. . . . . "Don't, Mark, . . . my pet, ... because of Uncle Iwan."

"Uncle Iwan isn't here."

"But he is very ill. . . . . Don't, love!"

"He can't hear it."

"But *I* do. Come here. Come here to

Auntie. Come and 'love' Auntie Gwen," she said, sinking her face into her hands.

Sympathy was somehow debilitated in him. He slowly sidled towards her, and when Gwen allowed him to approach, to rub against her without a move or a word on her part, he felt as a prince must feel when an enthusiastic reception is not forthcoming.

Over some thought of herself rather than of him, Gwen put one arm around his waist. He expected the customary hug; but she kept her head bent to her other hand, and did not say anything. He was almost vexed, and thought of the dresser handles again. She shortly lifted him to kneel upon her knees. She pressed his hair up from his brow, and her eyes appeared scorched when they looked into his. . . . . But after all, she could not bear the likeness which she had purposely sought. No, no, no! The look seemed to

come direct from Bryn-nant; and hugging Mark, she veiled her eyes in his neck.

Mark remembers the smart of her tears between their cheeks, he remembers Auntie Gwen wiping her face and his; he remembers how her distress was a dull mystery to him, which her muttering did not explain, and he remembers the dead inactivity of his own feelings. He was "sorry" for her, he wanted to be good, to be kind, he even wanted to cry with her; but he had nothing personal to cry for, he had not a tear at command, and he almost wept because he couldn't.

Gwen became restive. She took Mark with her up-stairs. She seated him on the bed and paced up and down the room, from the door to the window and from the window to the door, with her head bent, and the handkerchief to her eyes. Once she fell on her knees at the bed-side, buried her face in the clothes, and sobbed:

"Oh, Mark, Mark—poor Uncle Iwan! Auntie *must* cry, and if you are lonely, come!"

He thrust his arms about her, he tried to find her face, but could not; he tried to move her arm away, but could not; he spoke, he appealed, he cried; but on Gwen sobbed, heedless of his tears, as if, after all, she could best weep for Iwan alone.

* * * * * * *

Gwen went to sit, with Mark by her side, at the window. But she could not rest. She went to a chest of drawers, opened the long bottom drawer, and kneeling she brought out her very much mixed remnants of finery and began sorting them according to their kind on the bed-room floor. Mark looked on. A little framed glass portrait fell out of one of the batches of material, and Gwen anxiously examined it, afraid that it was broken. It was not broken, and she gazed at it as if to

read the very thought of the sitter at the moment the portrait was taken. Then she showed it to Mark to test if he knew it.

"Uncle. Uncle Iwan," he said.

Gwen pressed the picture to her bosom; then at the sound of Felicity's call coming up the stairs, "Missis, Missis! Missis dear!" she gave a peculiar cry and rose.

"Word from Bryn-nant. Poor Iwan is —gone. Five minutes wanting to two."

Gwen, with her hands pressing hard against her face, staggered to the bed and sat there silent and immovable. Mark climbed the bed and sat by her, but she did not heed. She did not move or speak or appear to breathe. Felicity touched her, saying:

"Missis? Are you faint?"

"My Iwan. My own, own Iwan. Gone! Gone!" moaned Gwen.

Felicity thereupon wept into her apron, and going to the window uttered lamentations.

"So sweet a lad was Iwan Wynn! No wonder everybody love him, ... though, . . . though indeed they only follow his good examples, . . . *he* had love for all, . . . for all, he had, . . . not one nor two, but everything. Oh, dear Iwan, I grieve for the dogs and horses and cattles at Bryn-nant, now. And the Lord be with his poor old mother this minute!"

"Don't, don't—don't, Felicity!" Gwen appealed.

"Well, he was so sweet a lad. I—I—can't help have feelings for him. I can't help it; and to see him go gradual before my eyes for months and fall like the leafs of Autumn; . . . and you sweethearts! . . . . and love each other so."

"Oh, Felicity, Felicity Robartch!—no more!—leave me, please! do go down."

"Indeed, my dear missis, I feel it. . . . I feel it as much as anyone, I do," answered

Felicity with her apron to her eyes, and turning from the window to leave. "The dear lad's death not come so near home to *me*, but I love him in my w

There was a brittle sound of breaking glass under Felicity's foot. Gwen uttered a cry of comprehending pain and was soon on her knees shedding the tears of a new grief upon Iwan's portrait crushed to atoms.

"Picture?" asked Felicity, "Picture? . . . Iwan Wynn's picture? No, no! You don't say? Missis! Oh Missis, if you do not give me forgiveness, I have you stamp *me* out, and out, in the same place. I feel that I kill him for you, this minute! Y mae yn wir! Y mae yn wir! (It is true! It is true!) But I could not help it. Help it? *Help* it? I would rather it my own head. Oh, my own heel is go through me; through and through me it is, to my own heart. But I am sure Iwan Wynn is forgive me himself, for he know

I no more tread on him 'cept by accidents than he would put his foot on me. He knows it, he knows it. I am sure this moment he forgive me—and better than earthly forgiveness too. Oh missis, missis, you are a bit hard on me! You are indeed. Aren't I sorrow to the very thoughts of my own grave? I did not know you had his picture out. I did not know you had the picture of him at all, ever. I have broke my own heart with the glass," bewailed Felicity pacing the floor, while Gwen still knelt over the fragments of the portrait murmuring, "Felicity, Felicity, Felicity."

"Oh, don't 'call' on me, missis. The lad is in my heel this minute. I feel I tread him down wheresoever I go. Perhaps I never more walk without Iwan Wynn crack under me—oh, Mistress, Mis-tress! Is it broke for ever or for moments? Will it mend? For goodness mercy don't tell Darve Wynn—he is

down, waiting for you—or *he* tread *my* life out; and—"

"Have you no mercy?" asked Gwen. "Go down. Go and tell Darve Wynn not to wait. . . . . I cannot see him."

"Well, indeed, my girl, you are not yourself enough—and I would not have him know for all the money in Denbigh," said Felicity, and she left the room.

"Where has Uncle Iwan 'gone'?" asked Mark huddling nearer Gwen, who was still on her knees.

"Bless you, my boy!" she exclaimed with a ring of real relieving joy in the cry. "Bless you!—Uncle Iwan is at rest, at peace; he is not ill now, no cough, no pain, ... no pain . . . but let us be quiet, . . . let us be still. Love Auntie Gwen! Yes, *love* poor Auntie," she repeated drawing him yet closer, and they remained for some time in each other's embrace.

* * * * * * *

Most of that night Gwen lay in bed far, far beyond the influence of Mark's feeble powers of solace. Such grief was to him a mystery. Her unprovoked weeping for something that was miles and miles away was to him inexplicable. Nevertheless that night aged Mark's feelings. For many hours he wept with her; and awoke at early dawn next morning five or six years older. Auntie Gwen was dearer to him; and he was dearer to Auntie Gwen. As they reclined, awake, Gwen spoke quietly of Uncle Iwan. She spoke of him as having "gone," she again spoke of his freedom from pain, from lingering weakness, and from anxious thoughts. Induced by her own candid words, Mark asked her simple childish questions about Death, and Life, and Love; and Gwen in the same simple child-like spirit answered him.

"And whose sweetheart will you have to be

now, Auntie?" was one of Mark's questions; but Gwen did not answer it. She hid her face upon his shoulder. He felt her shake and he put his arms around her head and clasped his hands as if for ever.

Wearied with grief they fell into a second sleep; and they slept until the brilliance of the sun awoke them to a bright busy autumn morning with the reapers among the oats.

CHAPTER XVI.

CURDS AND WHEY.

Two years later, Mark and Peggy were at Ty-Cremed for another change of air.

One afternoon a great low tub was in the centre of the dairy kitchen floor and several pairs of busy hands about it were breaking curds for cheese. Felicity was on her knees bobbing her head to and fro in her activity, and Peggy was at her side "helping." Auntie Gwen with her sleeves rolled up her arms, her afternoon dress skirt pinned up, and a large white apron from her bust to her ankles, was superintending: now going to the dairy, and now coming back to peep into the boiler and into a second low tub, steaming with whey.

Mark amused himself with a kitten. He

noted Felicity's to and fro movements, and tried to hook the kitten's claws in the spiral top-knot of her hair. He was successful several times, and though Felicity called him "a torments," and told him to take that old kitten from *her* "cheese in the making," she now and then pushed her head more forward than she had need, then pretended to be very much afraid of the kitten and jerked back to tempt him to be daring. When he almost lost his balance into the tub, she sprang to snatch the kitten from his hands, causing him to jump back with a merry tittering laugh which Auntie Gwen, Peggy, and Felicity quite enjoyed.

Mark therefore became more daring. He reached forward with a rapidly improving aim for Felicity's top-knot. He at last made such an uncommonly good aim that Felicity made an uncommonly vigorous attempt to catch him. He went reeling backward, laughing--reeling further and further--reeling too far—and Fe-

licity rose with a shriek, thrusting out her arms though she stood helplessly still. A steaming splash !—and Mark's merriest laugh was changed to a scream in the tub of hot whey.

Gwen snatched him dripping from the tub, almost tore most of his clothes off, but dreading delay sped with him to the dairy and lifted him into a tall mug of butter-milk up to his breast.

Felicity paced in and out of the place, bewailing that she never meant "scalded death to be by her own hands and her fun as innocent as a baby not yet born."

Gwen, active, but with tears rolling down her cheeks, told Felicity not to go crying and parading there, but to tell Abram Rees to take horse as fast as he could to Denbigh, for the doctor.

Felicity ran from the dairy, through the kitchen, and up the farm-yard declaring to

the men—"Mark has been drownded in the whey, and is this moment splash up to his neck in butter-milk—both pale as death; but, what a blessing I churn this morning and so give the lad plenty of cold for his heats."

Mark was put to bed, and while Gwen sat near him, holding his hand and feeling his brow, Peggy stood at the window looking over the farm fields to the main road to catch the first glimpse of the doctor's horse. Though the messenger had only had time to reach Denbigh they expected the doctor to be on the road. As Mark moaned, Gwen asked enough questions to cure him if questions could, and now and then ran to the window herself to look over the fields to the main road with straining eyes. Then she hastened to the bed again, cast herself near him, caressed him, and crooned her sympathy; but he moaned his pain, silent only when he went off into a doze very like a faint.

Gwen thought of Mark's father and mother. Should she send word to them? He was in her charge. She had promised that not a breath should harm him: and there he was, prostrate, terribly scalded, and, for all she knew, dying. She bent over him, she felt his hot forehead, she took his limp hand between her two, and as she again crooned over him, he feebly kissed her cheek. But it was such a faint and feeble kiss, with closed eyes! Oh, she had even made his kisses ill and killed his very glances.

"Dear, dear Mark!" she murmured; and Mark feebly muttered, "Aun—tie."

"Yes?" she said eagerly, but, in his wandering, his lips only moved inaudibly to the form of "Auntie—Auntie."

It was merely the silent shade of the word, and Gwen dreaded the hint.

"Any sign of Doctor Price, Peggy?" implored Gwen.

"No," answered Peggy impatiently, flashing her dark eyes from the landscape to the bed, and from the bed to the landscape again, as if she would create a doctor by her glance.

Felicity, miserable, ventured up to the bedroom door, peeped in and entered on tip-toe, unseen by Gwen, who was nestling by Mark. She peeped over Gwen's form to the boy's. In a whisper, as of dead leaves, she said, "He is dead-pale—isn't he, missis?"

Gwen, startled, suddenly rose and unable to bear the ghostly whisper and presence, decisively pointed to the door.

"Thank goodness, missis, you did the whey yourself," said Felicity retreating, "but blessings on us, I had good butter-milk all ready or—" and Gwen closed the door on the voice, and went to the window. She saw, just as Peggy saw, the speck of a man on horseback at a great distance on the main

road. He was hidden now and then by the groups of trees and the over-grown hedge; but emerged each time a little larger and more definite, and Gwen in her thankfulness lifted Peggy on the chair and embraced her as they stood watching.

Peggy was all exclamation and rapture. The doctor's presence alone would relieve Mark at once.

But the doctor could only anoint Mark with oil and lay him in a nest of lint, and to Peggy's and Gwen's discomfiture Mark instantly became worse instead of better, for his blisters began to burn more fiercely and to smart more keenly.

"You must be a good little fellow," said the doctor, covering Mark and his cries with the bed-clothes. "A brave, patient little man, and get well and play with your sister Peggy again."

Taking up his tall rough beaver hat and

riding-whip he left the room, and Gwen followed.

Down-stairs they had a brief consultation. He warned her that all depended upon the nursing and the boy's patience. He had most serious scalds around his hips and about his thighs, and the shock had made him feverish. He certainly wanted very great care.

Gwen hardly realised that the doctor was shaking hands with her, and saying, "Good-afternoon. I'll be here in the morning. Apply the oil. Good-day."

When the doctor rode away Gwen consigned Peggy to Felicity in the dairy, and hastened up-stairs to Mark; and for many a night and day she lived there, nursing him.

CHAPTER XVII.

PERFORMANCES.

MARK nestled in lint for several weeks. Gwen, Nain, and Peggy nursed; Felicity brought him new milk; the doctor brought him physic; Darve brought him troutlets; Abram Rees prayed on Sunday nights with a little gathering of "hands" in the kitchen; and Elias Lewis regularly sent over a packet of sweets on the morning following the Denbigh market day.

But Mark continued seriously ill and was so strange one Saturday night while Nain was there that Gwen, at last giving way, cried out—"I'll send for his mother!"

"Indeed no, no, my girl. Mareea could do no more than *we* do, and what of it then?

Why—well, it is no use! Poor Mareea! she little think what is keep them; and tell the truth I wouldn't like such deceptions myself. But it is better, and for the world don't send her one notion of what *is*. I'll take the children home myself, please God, and all be well, and tell everything when no harm come of it."

"Very well," said Gwen, "but I do wish he would show some signs. He doesn't eat, and he has gone so thin."

"Bless you, he will plump up again better than never, you will see. And a better lad couldn't be for sickness, and bear it. A lamb is patience they say, but he is as good as two, in his wools, bless him!"

* * * * * * *

It was a wearisome watching, between hope and fear; and Mark was so dormant for so long that if he only turned up his dimmed eyes to her, Gwen was thankful and proud.

Many a night she reclined in her clothes beside him. Sometimes weariness overcame her and she slept; and when she awoke she gazed at him wildly, dreading the worst, for she had a haunting responsibility which followed her even into her dreams.

One eventful and historical noon, Mark called "for one of those little fishes" for his dinner. A thrill of delight travelled from the room, down the stairs, through the kitchen, up the yard to the barn and the stables; and it was Auntie Gwen who conveyed it.

"Mark has asked for fish—fish! Jacob Jones! David Thomas! Go down—catch troutlets—run the dam dry—bring the first you take—quick now!" were Gwen's flying orders, and Jacob Jones and David Thomas hastened down to the stream.

Three silver troutlets were caught. Mark saw them before they were cooked—and after. He ate one, he sat up in bed, he spoke to

Gwen about the kitten, and Felicity, and the tub. He asked if Uncle Darve had caught the fish, and later on he asked where were all the sweets that Mr. Lewis had sent.

From that day Mark improved. The doctor said so, Nain confirmed the doctor, Bet confirmed Nain, Darve swore it, Felicity said it was "now ridiculousness for the missis to be so anxious," Peggy was allowed to approach the bed, and Mark's pale face began to smile.

In the course of time he did more. Whenever the bed-room door opened his covetous eye enquired—"Troutlets!" "or Cakes?" "or Jelly?" "or anything else?" and that look of his established the rule that nobody except Gwen should enter the room without bringing a tribute to the little Cæsar. Men and women, young men and maidens, and children, whether paying visits of congratulation, of sympathy, or of inspection, loyally paid toll,

and placed their tributes virtually at the feet of the little monarch in bed, but really on a little table at the side.

Mark day by day beheld his sweetmeats with a better appetite, his toys with livelier fun, and his accumulated wealth of pence (for some gave coin) with a keener appreciation: a sure sign to all that he was beginning to feel the world about him again.

In due course he sat with Gwen, Peggy, and Nain, at the bed-room window, looking out upon the fields now mainly dotted with lines and curves of sheaves, watching the carts pass to and fro, now laden with sheaves, now empty, and now laden again.

Nor was he short of entertainment up in that room. Peggy usually carried up Kitten Topsy, and with a frill around its neck, and a skirt about its body, the little thing was nursed out of its own species into her own, and had to behave as such. Gwen sometimes gave a

long whistle of invitation to Nelson, and if the staircase door happened to be open, he bounded up in mad delight, first paying court to his mistress and then to Mark by licking their hands and pawing their knees. If Peggy had Topsy on her knee, Nelson simply gave her a polite retreating bow. Sometimes he came up without being whistled and looked around the door with beseeching eyes, and if Gwen kept him waiting too long he moved along the wall, crouched under the bed, travelled from the head to the foot, and lifting the valance with his nose, renewed his appeal there—but in wonderful readiness to be at the door first if Gwen should disapprove and rise.

It was over one of those rushing races for the door on the part of Nelson and Gwen, that Mark had his first hearty laugh, and Gwen repeated it so often to please him that instead of Nelson making for the door he began to bound and bark about Gwen, as much as

to say, "If it's fun you want, come, we'll have some!"—and after that they had fun with him almost every day. Nelson indeed, between Gwen, Mark, and Peggy, had a busy time of it.

The most glorious events of the period of Mark's convalescence were Auntie Gwen's wonderful and daring performances with the Great Russian Bear, the African Lion, and the Royal Bengal Tiger—otherwise Nelson. The performances were impromptu, never twice alike and always full of wonderful doings to be wonderfully described by Mark and Peggy to the next visitor,—how Nelson stretched himself up the bed-post, wagged his tail and barked, without daring to come down until he had word from Gwen; how he would lie down and let Gwen put her foot on his neck, pull his tail, and tickle the pads of his paws; how he mounted and vaulted chairs and sprang after Gwen, pawing her forward till she commanded

him to "stand off!" how she trained him in a small den between the chest of drawers and the wall, where he had to sit up—and growl—and shew his teeth—and give his paw—and allow the daring and indomitable trainer to place her bare arm in his mouth; and how the performance was usually brought to a close with a beautiful tableau—Gwen, panting and red, with one knee on the floor, receiving the noble beast's fore-paws on the other knee, her arm around his neck, his tongue dangling, and his eyes glaring with a pride too ecstatic to bear without giving it expression in an occasional bark in her face.

Yes, they were marvellous performances: performances never since approached, Mark declares, for spontaneity, freshness, and excitement, by any performance with real bears, lions, or tigers behind the bars of any Royal Grand Menagerie; as no performer, black or white, has since equalled Auntie Gwen for personal

beauty, for alertness, for invention, and noble daring. And as for the final tableau where the beast was won by love and not by pistols, why, in place of the common clapping of hands, Mark always ran from his seat and applauded Gwen with a rapturous hug and kiss. He was followed by Peggy, the three of them were pawed by Nelson into a laughing heap, and *the* end would be a final scramble and roll on the floor, where Nain would come and startle them into decorum again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOME.

MARK and Peggy were so long over-due at home that their mother began to suspect something was wrong. Nain was to bring them at once; and Nain, soon after that, obeyed the command and took the children home.

On the following morning Mark awoke in his old bed-room in his original home. He was disappointed. He went down stairs; and was more disappointed still. There was something wrong about the place. His father and mother, his sister Peggy, and a new baby brother, were there; but they and the house fell short of a certain standard of a larger and more varied existence. He ill-humouredly made social, domestic, and personal contrasts

that were not complimentary to his surroundings. Where was the dairy? And the inexhaustible milk? And the shippon? And the stables? And the cart shed with the fowls? And the store attic with the apples and the pears? And where, aye, where was Auntie Gwen? And Nelson? And Madam and the gig? And the rabbit pies? And the milky rice puddings? Where! In an inaccessible world beyond the great sea which the Rhyl Packet crossed; and he was depressed.

His mother, quick and sympathetic, noted the dullness of the lad. She noted it for several days and then remarked about it to his father—and his father devoted his nights to the making of a wonderful kite the shape of a man. The kite went up the sky, Mark "held" it and rejoiced, the kite came down again; and Mark's spirits too.

At last Mark's mother asked what ailed him? What did he want? He was too

ashamed to tell, and whenever alone, he played little dramatic episodes and games in his fancy—episodes in which Auntie Gwen took the first part, he the second, and Nelson and Madam the third, the properties of the little mental drama now and then being augmented by the introduction of some ideal pudding or pie, or some especially fine roasted apple of the past. Then came the somehow convincing secret expectation that every knock at the front door—the knock of the postman, of the chip girl, of the fish-hawker or of the tinker—was Gwen's ; and then the disillusion again !

One day, many months later, Auntie Gwen came. To Mark it was a miracle, and he leapt to her embrace and would not release her even to allow Peggy a chance to greet her as well.

How beautiful, fresh, and buoyant she looked ! Her figure was even more lithe, a little

taller, with more vivacity in the movements; and yet, with all the old ease-seeking lounge, as if by a nestling movement out of one easy position into another still easier, she re-cast the sofa corner into a nest for her form. And as he beheld the Auntie Gwen of the enchanted past lounging there he ran to her inviting voice, her inviting arms, and to her rewarding hug and kiss, like a spirit to its home.

But it was an angel's visit. She bewitched him—and went. She stayed five hours, as a fact; but when she had gone, the hours shrank into the compass of a moment. Finally, that moment went out like a light and he had but a haunting dream to mock his eyes, his arms, his lips.

END OF PART I.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

AN EVENTFUL TIME.

THE years of boyhood went, and the years of youth came. Mark had left school and was in an office on the Liverpool Exchange.

The first annual holiday he had was a great event and could only be rightly consecrated at Ty-Cremed. He went there, and a most eventful time it was. His Auntie Gwen, whom he had not seen for several years, was more than all he had imagined of her. To his joy her ardent interest in him had not ceased. She could not do enough for him. As the faithful Felicity said—"It was Mark everything, and everything was Mark, and Mark was no end."

"And why not?" answered Gwen.

He had the pick of last year's apples; he had nuts; he had a new-laid egg beaten up in milk every morning; he was served first at the table—and last too, when the rice-pudding was exceptionally good. Gwen sat lounging with him on the sofa after dinner, went rambling in the afternoon, linked her arm through his and took him beyond the orchard to the wood where he was once lost; or she drove him in the high gig to Denbigh, St. Asaph, Rhuddlan, and Rhyl; and visited friends to whom she proudly introduced him.

But one historical afternoon there came to Ty-Cremed a woman, a neighbour. She brought with her Sadness, and she, Sadness, and Gwen, sat talking very gravely in Welsh by the farm kitchen fire. They spoke of the deadly cattle distemper that was then spreading from shippon to shippon throughout the Vale. It had been creeping round and round, binding Ty-Cremed in a belt of ravaging dis-

ease. Gwen was sorely afraid that it had at last circled in upon them, for "Black'en" had taken suddenly ill. The farrier had been sent for, Felicity, she, and the men, had done all they could for the poor beast, and now they had only to wait.

After the visitor had gone Gwen sat in the arm-chair, gazing into the fire—heedless of everything but anxiety. Because of this, Mark joined Felicity Robartch as she was going with an earthenware pan of milk to a motherless foal, a sprightly and vain young thing on stilts of legs, that knew Felicity like a personal friend. They had only to cross the farm-yard to a wall, where Mark, to get a good view of the operations, mounted some roughly piled logs near the saw pit. Felicity then fixed the pan on the wall for Mark to hold, and wooingly called, "Twe, twe—twe, twe, twe."

The foal came prancing down the field like

a long-legged lamb frisking from hind feet to fore feet, now rearing as if to climb the air, and shaking its head there, and now bounding forward proud of the accomplishment. Its legs, however, were apparently half a yard longer than it was aware of, for after one of those upward flights the fore feet touched earth with a jerking trip which sent him on his knees in a sort of forced grace before he reached the wall; but righted again, he trotted towards the dish of milk with an ecstatic wag of its pretty head and a neigh of gratitude. "Twe, twe," Felicity muttered, and lo! quite a spasm of pride seized the creature, up it reared as if to mount the wall, brought down its hoof on the dish, smashed it, and splashed most of the milk over Mark. He fell between the logs where nettles grew tall and thick, and by the time Felicity extricated him, his face, neck, and hands had all the symptoms of sickening for the measles.

Felicity did what she could for him, but he sought Gwen.

Scarcely had Gwen wheeled one end of the sofa nearer the fire for him and herself, when Felicity ran through the dairy and the back kitchen into the front kitchen, wringing her hands and wailing.

"Mistress! mistress! Black'en is dead! Black'en is gone!"

Gwen rose, and stood by the sofa-arm, flushed with torture.

"Not Black'en!" she cried, moving a step forward, then standing with her palms to her eyes, she murmured—"My Black'en; my best—"

"Without a breath or a move, mistress; as good dead as a stone, if dead *can* be good, in the likes of this! And such a beauty of a beast; as good as ever turned grass to milk. Oh, mistress, mistress, what does the Almighty mean with the farmers, as feed His own cattle

on His own grounds? Three at the Pandy, four at the Crosses, five at Isycoed, and now our Black'en to begin with!"

Gwen ran with Felicity to the shippon.

At the sight of the beautiful glossy black cow dead in its stall, Gwen fell on her knees near its head, patting it, fitting her half-closed hand to its ear and caressing it by drawing her hand to and fro, while she murmured as if to the listening dead—"My Beauty! My Pet! Dear Black'en—the flower of them all!"

Felicity moaned to every exclamation, and two men stood looking on like the sorrowful witnesses of Fate.

A moan and a heavy fall two stalls away, caused the women and men to stand aghast.

A beautiful roan was on its back, breathing heavily.

"Lord help us!" muttered Gwen.

"Indeed, Amen, Mistress dear, Amen!"

"My poor Vixen, now; my poor Vixen! What, what can I do for you?" asked Gwen, helpless; and as a terrible reply the cow rolled on its side dead.

The farrier was anxious and active; but what could he, what could they, what could Darve, Elias Lewis, and other neighbours do? The disease defied them all.

Five of Gwen's finest dairy cows dropped dead in their stalls next day and Mark saw them drawn by a couple of horses, out of the shippon, up the yard, into a field behind the orchard and buried there, while Nip, the yard Collie that had so often seen them to and fro between the shippon and the fields, followed each cow, sniffed enquiringly at the hoofs and with its ears drawn and its tail drooped, barked in a low mystified way.

Not a hand on the farm went to bed that night. Felicity and Gwen almost lived in the shippon, doing what they could in suspected

cases; and the men sat chatting by lantern light in the stables, ready for any emergency.

Two more fine cows fell during the night, rending the silence with their thrilling thuds. The men heard Felicity's scream and Gwen's moan and hastened from the stable. Help was useless. Nothing could be done but to bury the poor beasts in the graves dug in readiness. Two horses were roused from their sleep. Their chains jingled and chinked on the quiet midnight air from the stables to the shippon, making the cock on the cart shed rafters mistake the night for the day, and the two latest victims were dragged from their stalls, drawn up the yard to the field beyond the orchard, and buried by lantern-light and shadow, and the light of the tranquil stars.

CHAPTER II.

GWEN'S SURRENDER.

THE shippon began to look desolated. Three more cows hung their heads, and moaned, and panted as if doomed. At daybreak enquiring neighbours called. The farrier came with fresh instructions. Gwen, Felicity, and the men, earnestly carried them out; but three other beautiful animals were dragged up the yard to the field that very day. Nip, the Collie, sickened in one of the stalls, too ill to follow the third cow; and at night he was dragged with the fourth to his rest behind the orchard.

By noon next day, not one of Gwen's twenty fine cows stood in the long shippon. The place was now indeed desolated. The

stalls gaped empty and silent. Even the sparrows had deserted them. The chains and rings around the posts were there; the shining marks made by the habitual movements of the cows on the pine posts and the partitions of the stalls; the half-empty low racks and the troughs were there; the sweet and ghostly odour was there; and above each rack was a name—Black-one; Beauty; Vixen; Primrose; Red Ear; Queen; Princess; Gwen; Ann's Own; Fairy; Angel; Bright-Eye; etc.,—but each name was now only a mockery, for every cow on Gwen's farm was in the earth and under lime.

Not only the shippon, but the house was desolated. The whole farm was. The men worked with languid, half-hearted movements, Felicity appeared absolutely witless among her milkless pails and pans, and the sight of the empty stalls which she could not resist going to see at milking time made her crazy with sobs.

Gwen, in her grief, sat with her feet on the kitchen fender gazing into the fire. Now and then with her head bent in her hands she cried the names of her lost ones: "My Black'en, my Vixen, and Primrose, and Bright-Eye, and Angel, and Fairy, and Gwen!—" and buried her face in her lap.

Mark bent his face close to hers and a tranquillity like comfort came to both.

While they were in the trance of that tranquillity, a knock at the front door startled Mark, and caused Gwen to turn her dress skirt from over her knees down to her feet again. . . . . She did not rise to answer the door, however. Her grief again took hold of her and she sat gazing it into the fire.

A more elaborate knock roused her and she went to the door, followed by Mark.

The door was opened—to let in a pause of embarrassment and to let out a pause of surprise.

The silence was broken by the faltering voice of a tall, smooth-faced young man of thirty-three, in knee breeches.

"I called, Miss Gwinell, to see—"

"Come—in,—Mr. Lewis."

"Thank you—I—er—I—"

"Take a seat," said Gwen indicating the sofa and moving her chair from the front of the fire.

They were face to face with the length of the long fender between them.

"Well, young gentleman, how are you enjoying your holiday?" Elias Lewis asked Mark, leaning forward with his elbow on his knees and twirling his hat between his hands.

Mark only sighed as he stood by Gwen with his arm along the back of her chair.

"You seem in trouble like the most of us, little man; though it is early for yours to begin. . . . . You haven't been over to see me yet. I've a fine little pony that would just fit

you. . . Yes, these are hard times, Miss Gwinell. Isacoed has lost two more fine beasts, and three have fallen at Talyfoel, and five are hanging their heads at Hugh Roche's. I came over to see if I could be of any help."

Gwen became uneasy and looked into her black afternoon apron.

"I—er—I know you have your own man and plenty of hands; but I have two capital milkers all right. I'll send their yield over—for your own use—to keep you going—until you get straight again—I'll send it with pleasure."

Gwen's thoughts went back eight years. What indignities she had subjected this same Elias Lewis to!—and yet here he was in the hour of need the bearer of a generous offer.

But the obligation would mean visits and enquiries. She halted.

"Now don't think it any trouble. I'll only be too glad; or if there is anything else I can do, say the word, Miss Gwinell."

"No, thank you. I'll wait," said Gwen, and to occupy herself, drew Mark to her and fondled him.

"Why, why," thought Elias Lewis, "does she do such an exquisitely galling act before his eyes; why lavish on a mere boy who stood like an unresponding post, caresses that every nerve of his would have leapt to meet."

A flush passed up his pale, bare face; Gwen happened to see it, and a pallor instantly spread over hers.

"Let me do *something!*" he entreated with resolution. "Anything at all, in any way you please. Let me send the milkings—for the house, for your own use, until you get into your regular way again."

"I—have—arranged," faltered Gwen. But in the honest company of his generosity her falsehood became ashamed of itself. Her pallor quickly changed to a fierce blush and she

added, "Well, not exactly arranged; but I have thought of it."

"Then you must have thought of me; for mine is the only clear dairy in the district."

That thought had not been near her; she was still more confused, still more ashamed.

"You can arrange it with me now," he continued good-humouredly. "Say the milkings of two cows a day, until further notice? . . . . What do *you* say, young man? You would, wouldn't you? Don't stand on ceremony, Miss Gwinell. It will be no trouble; none at all. I'll only be too glad."

"Very well—thank you," said Gwen, glad to moderate the heat of her fierce blush by the cooling satisfaction of a little truth, and to cover her surrender she gave Mark an impulsive kiss.

Elias Lewis bit his own envious lower lip and tried to smile at Mark, released from Gwen's

embrace. Fingering his vest pocket he tempted Mark to the sofa by the glittering exposure of a sixpence. He gave Mark the coin, patted him on the shoulder—and kissed him.

"You two kissed just the same spot," said Mark looking for the date of the coin. "It's a 1860, Auntie Gwen."

If ever a young woman ardently wanted to give out her exasperation in one long adequate pinch, it was Gwen at that moment; and because Elias Lewis had submitted her to that awful trial by following her own foolish act with a still more foolish one, she decided that he would have to keep his milk. Annoyed with herself, with him, and with Mark, she stooped pretending to fasten her shoe lace, and wished the man would go.

Before Gwen had quite done with her lace, Felicity appeared at the kitchen door. She summoned all her breath to exclaim—

"Mr. Lewyis? You quite 'stonish *me!*"

"And how are *you*, Felicity Robartch?" he asked.

"Well as can be; well as a body can be in these death's days. What about milk—eh—Mistress? We must 'range somewhere for it. There's the foal and two calves and say nothing of ourselves."

"I am to send you the milkings of two cows," said Elias Lewis.

"Well, well! And when can we have the first, Mr. Lewyis? Those calves cry shame on me for give them oatmeals and water—"

"Perhaps you will both mind your own business!" said Gwen, rising from her stooping position, standing ruffled and fiery.

"Well, indeed, mistress, it's more than *cow's* milk, it's the milk of human goodness for Mr. Lewyis to come to us at this scarce time; and where else on the wide earth of the Vale can we get milkings for woman, boy, and beast?"

"Will you mind your own business, Felicity Robartch?"

"Whose else business is it, my good mistress?" said Felicity likewise losing her temper, though standing stiff and erect on her pattens, "whose else business in truth is it but for a dairy woman to mind after milk? I can't teat it from pan-mugs and slabs—and the stones—and the walls, and I'll not live me here to have the calves and that fool of a foal cry on me asleep and wake, and wake and sleep; and that's truth for you. Why, I heard 'em in my sleeps last night—heard, I did, till I milk my own fingers and thumb for 'em and 'tis no trifle to milk a full shippon of twenty cows on one's dreaming hands like that in one's bit of sleep—and all for nothing. If there was bed of milk in the morning I wouldn't mind. . . . . Let goodness bless us, my dear mistress! —for peace's own sakes let us have what we can get, and more if possible, or send you the

calves to the butcher, and the foal to the tanner, and me to that orchard field, for indeed I have a cattle complaints for the want of 'em, myself. Yes, you may laugh, Elias Lewyis, but it's truth; and you, mistress, too. It's a pity that one as has been 'customed to go to twenty cows, can't catch sight of a drop of milk 'less I dream of it, and it all go for nothing when I wake; and my pans and pails gape at me quite ready to go to the shippon, if it was of use, poor things. Why, this very morning at shippon time like nothing else but ears round the dairy, was they, list'ning for the usual fall of milk into 'em, and behold you—behold you, Mistress and Mr. 'Lias Lewyis—the only wet sound as fall in one of 'em this morning was a suddent drop of my own tear—truth!—and I near go beside my own wits with frights, for I thought—and the Lord forgive me—the Almighty was making miracle of milk out of my own eye. Truth; indeed truth! (Gwen re-

mained silent), goodness bless us, Mr. Lewyis! —let us have what we can get and be thankful. Mistress here is fret too much to think. Can you send this afternoon, my good man? Listen!—let your own ears hear those calves now for yourself. 'Tis milk they want, though I know this minute their noses is white with good meals and water."

"In half an hour," he said, rising and moving away.

"Make it a quarter—if you *can*—there's my good man—I will have a sort of thirst myself till it come."

"You are too expecting, Felicity," said Gwen.

"No, no," he replied, opening the front door for himself, and before Gwen realized that he was going, he went.

"Well, indeed, Missis," said Felicity, "he's a good heart after all."

Gwen did not condescend to reply and

immediately went up-stairs, keenly eyed by Mark.

"And what is that money-piece you have, Mark?" asked Felicity. "Not a sixpence? Well, yes, truth; and who gave you that, my boy?"

"Mr. Lewis."

"Mr. Lewyis—did he? And you like Mr. Lewyis?"

"Not much."

"Why, my lad?"

"Because Auntie Gwen doesn't."

"Bless us!" muttered Felicity—"But you like him 'nough to take his money."

"'Twas him."

"Don't you mistake, my boy," she said in a lower tone and with her eye on the staircase door. "He didn't give it to *you*."

"Yes, he did."

"Yes, yes, in your hand; but not to *you*."

"To me, myself."

"No; not to you, nor yourself."

"Felicity Robartch, he did!"

"Mark—Mark Whatever-your-name-is—he didn't. You think so, my clever fellow; but you're not clever by half enough. You think so; but *he* doesn't, I'll be bound. And I wouldn't have a thing that wasn't give proper to me myself."

"It *was*. I ought to know."

"How know you, wise man? Ha, ha! Ha, ha, *ha!* He give *you* it? and kiss *you?* There's where you twice mistake Elias Lewyis. Kiss you? Kiss nonsense! I guarantee you, it was not you he kiss at all," she said turning to go.

"Why, it was!"

"You think 'was.' I don't care if my own eyes see his kiss cross and double on your very cheek, I not believe he kiss *you*, in his heart. And who'd have kiss and sixpence as not belong to 'em! Mark, my lad, you are only

half old, you be older just now—if you're not too simpled hearted to live. Why, *I* would knock Elias Lewyis on the mouth if he practice on me what his mind give somebody else. You are not full born in this world yet, though you *are* town bred!" said Felicity laughing a fiendish, fool-making laugh. "Not full born yet, my lad, but you're eyes open some day and then you'll 'member what Felicity Robartch mean. For the present your Auntie like two sweethearts to her bow—one old one, and one young one; one to think of and one to her hands—looks like it, whatever—and you are young grindstone to sharp their both lips on. Oh, Mark, innocents, you live and learn; you live and learn yet!" and with a laugh she went to the dairy, and left Mark miserable. There was something in what that mysterious all-seeing Felicity had said, for Auntie Gwen was vexed with him; Auntie Gwen was vexed! He was wretched.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT MARK DID.

THE staircase door was opened, and he went to the bottom of the stairs and listened. He could only hear a wasp buzzing about the landing and in and out of one of the rooms. It was not Gwen's room, because her door was closed. He could tell that by the absence of a certain patch of light from the dark landing wall. He was afraid to call "Auntie Gwen!" and slowly went to the sofa-arm. He stood leaning against it. The sixpence was almost burning a hole through his hand. He was tempted to throw it into the fire—but a prophetic vision of the market value of the coin in Liverpool, warned him not to be rash.

But Auntie Gwen? He had not seen her

look so annoyed before. He had somehow vexed her.

"Mark!"

"Yes! yes?" he gratefully answered, going to the bottom of the stairs, "Yes?" he called again.

But there was no response. The landing was exactly as it was before—the wasp still buzzing to and fro, and no light from Gwen's room.

He was sure he had heard her voice. It sounded on the stair—at the stairs door—yes, at his ear.

It was, indeed, at his ear; but at the inner side of it, for the sound was one of those ventriloquial effects of the fancy by means of which the fancy tricks the heart with phantasmal sounds of a voice that is dear.

He was afraid to ascend, and again called up the staircase; but no answer came. A galling dejection weighed upon him. Auntie Gwen vexed? He turned away, with all his

thoughts and feelings rushing to his throat, and went to the window. The glass was bleared, the whole sky was bleared, the whole world was—and he bent over the table.

In the next moment he was on the stairs—going up them—by the time he reached her bed-room door the emotion had gathered all its force, he was in its power, it made him shout 'Auntie! Auntie Gwen!"—it flung him against the door—it opened the door—it brought Gwen from her imprisonment.

"My boy, my dear, dear Mark!" she cried kneeling and clasping him, pressing her face near his and cooing petting terms of endearment into his ear. "What is to do?"

"I thought you was—vexed."

"Vexed? What about, Mark?" she asked, rising, leading him into the room and closing the door.

"This," he replied, exposing the sixpence on his palm. "You—you—looked cross."

"Not at you, Mark."

"And I couldn't help him giving it. But I don't want it, I wish I never had it, I do. And if you had only looked cross *then*, or nudged me—then I'd have known. I didn't know you would not like me to have it. I thought you would have been glad to see me get it, but you wasn't—you—"

"What on earth does the boy mean?" muttered Gwen. "You've been thinking your little head crazy, Mark."

"No, I haven't," gasped Mark as the old emotion rushed back and his head sank on Gwen's shoulder, hardly knowing what he did mean. "Here!" he cried, trying to force the coin into her hands. "Here, take it!"

"I don't want it, Mark."

"Then I don't!" he said, hurling the coin from his hands, and it rolled under the bed.

"Come, come, Mark, you have been fret-

ting too much about this; far too much. Listen—"

"But you looked vexed; and at me. At me, you did."

"I'm not vexed now."

"But you *was*, Auntie; that's the thing. You *was*; I know you're not now; but now isn't *then*, and it's then I'm all the time thinking of. I do wish there was no then when it's like that."

A brief laugh escaped Gwen.

"I do!" said Mark as a reply to it. "It spoils *all* the rest; and I have to go home to-morrow, and I wanted to go home enjoying myself—"

"To-morrow? You needn't go to-morrow."

That sobered Mark. He drew himself up, stood erect, and in quite a changed boy-of-the-world manner he said—"It's the office, Auntie Gwen; the office."

"Tut!" answered Gwen, hardly able to make her twinkles serious enough.

"But the master expects me. He expects me."

"Not he."

"He *does*. The day after to-morrow's the day—I counted. Oh, I'll *have* to go. Why, if I stayed—but I can't, I can't."

"Pooh!"

"Auntie Gwen! It's the OFFICE! THE COTTON BROKERS' ASSOCIATION, BROWN'S BUILDINGS, STUDLEY MARTIN, SECRETARY, where you've been writing, you know. It *has* to be open; somebody *has* to be in it; the master can't go out, unless I'm there."

"Hasn't he been out for a week, then?"

"He'd *have* to go out a bit—just a bit."

"Well; look at that!"

"Yes, but he'd have to lock-up and put a paper on the door or ask the Chamber of Commerce next door to listen if anybody

came; and they don't like that *too* much. You know it isn't every office lad that gets a holiday, and as mother says, I mus'n't abuse it. Nine o'clock the day after to-morrow morning's the time, and I've promised. Oh, I'll *have* to go, Auntie--have to!"

"And—wouldn't—you—stay—if—Auntie—wanted—you—to?" asked Gwen with would-be solemn pauses.

The pauses were so very solemn to Mark that most of his reply was in the tremour of his lower lip and the appeal of his eyes.

"I would, Auntie Gwen—if—you—wanted—so—bad—that—I—*couldn't* go; but I've promised. It's *an office* open every day, you know, nine till five, and they *never* keep a boy back from an office. Just you fancy all the office boys kept back, why!—but you see you don't know offices—don't keep me, Auntie, unless it's something tremendous, I advise you! Master might get another lad."

"Then you could stay here altogether," answered Gwen, amused by the commercial crisis.

"Well—yes—but—you see. No, Auntie Gwen, I advise you to let me go, for you wouldn't believe how offices expect you up to time."

"But suppose your master doesn't want you?"

"Doesn't *want* me? Doesn't want *me*? He never gave me the least look like that. He's the Secretary I've been with so long, Auntie Gwen. I'd sooner come again—some other time—"

"But the man doesn't want you."

"What man?"

"Your master."

"He's a gentle-man, Auntie Gwen; why, his office has a carpet and all the letters come with Esquire on, and they're *all* gentlemen as come to speak to him, and you should see him on the 'flags,' the Exchange, you know, with a

note-book, nice little oval things just the size of his waistcoat-pocket, with *crowds* round him ; and he comes away fussy and with his face all red with business. My word, they do crush round him in the afternoons and he tells them something that sends them flying. I can see it from our window. He tells them about the bales of cotton and the prices or something."

"Well, the 'gentleman,' then ; he doesn't want you. He says so."

"He hasn't been ? Oh, you're plaguing !"

"I have had a letter."

"From master ?—from Studley Martin ? No, no ! . . . . Let me see ! Yes, that *is* our envelope—he always uses ready stamped ones —and our letter paper too !"

"There now, you see. Read it."

Mark seized the letter and read it about as minutely as a hunter reads the grass it leaps over. "'D—r M—d—m,'" he mumbled at

leaps and bounds,"'Much pleased, ... enjoying himself, . . . need not return until Friday, . . . wish it, . . . but not later.' And you *wrote*, and without asking *me*? That's splendid,—as it happens! Not until Friday; but you see he says 'not later than.' I know why, it's the weekly meeting and I fix the table. Yes, this is master's writing. Isn't it like a daddy-long-leg's legs? He writes with a long white steel. And he's had a new one for this —see how thin to start with—and he's had a blot. His pens are awful for dropping blots when they're new, it's like as if they're greasy. But fancy—Friday—and all through you! See his signature—'Studley Martin'—I can make his S's and his M's, when I hold the pen high up, like he does, and think I'm him. Mother says there's no knowing, I might be some day."

"Well, you might be. Will you stay with Auntie Gwen, now?"

"Yes, will I—till Friday. So long as it's all right I'm safe. It was rather a wonder for you to write. Wouldn't I have been afraid if I'd known! I never knew a boy to stay from an office unless he died or something like that. I once got off for an afternoon to have a tooth pulled, because the master couldn't have me moaning about the office. But I much rathered the office, I can tell you."

Mark almost forgot his conflict in the new excitement. He and Gwen sat at the window, looking across the fields and down the verdant vale, ripening in the brilliant but clouded sunlight of midsummer. Breezes came through the open lattice with the scent of sweet-briar and wall-flower, with the tremulous bleating of sheep and the cawings of crows; and soon with the earthy odour of rain from the dusty road, and fresh fragrance from the grassy land. It was only a local shower, and soon over. Masses of silver haze crept from between the

mountains to the vale to gleam there like wandering systems of sunbeams that had escaped from the sun; while two distinct and brilliant rainbows hung like ethereal links to hold the jewel of the earth in their clasp.

Gwen looked up at them. Mark looked up at them. They were phenomenally clear in line and definite in colour, and Gwen yielding to a superstitious impulse that had the pleasure of playing with Fate in it, said—"Here, Mark, cross wrists and take hold of hands—that's it—look up at the rainbows—and wish. Don't look down until you have. . . . . Have you?"

"Yes, I wished—"

"Oh, you must not tell me."

"Then what did you wish?" he asked.

"And I must not tell you."

"I wished for a 'rise' at the office."

"Now! You have spoilt it! We won't get our wish."

"Then if it's spoiled, you might as well tell me what it was."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," she said, but by way of recompense gave him a kiss. Then she suddenly announced in playful self-contradiction, "Mark, I don't love you, a bit."

"Yes, you do," he answered with unromantic calm.

"No, I don't."

"You—do."

"I don't—I don't—I don't—I don't!" Then at sight of him she laughed, and by way of penance for her falsehoods she spoke the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in a violent embrace. Seeing him delighted, she exclaimed with mock severity, "Go away! Go away from *me*. Go away!" she repeated, pushing him from her. "*You* are not my Sweetheart."

"I am," he answered with a quiver of the lip.

"You are—not."

"Please!" he appealed.

"You're not—you're not—you're not—you —are—*not!*"

"Well, whether I am yours or not—you are mine," answered Mark.

Gwen's eyes gleamed, and on his behalf as it were she instantly ratified that earnest declaration by another impulsive embrace. When the violence had spent itself and the crooning had ceased, though they were still in each other's arms—she sitting, he standing —a dead calm of satisfied emotion came to them, even thought was lulled into reveries and dreams, words were nothing, gratified existence was everything: and so they dreamed until a sigh from Gwen awoke them, and without the utterance of a word their arms unlocked and they stood apart, awake in the world again.

Gwen stood leaning against the window frame looking up the vale. Mark, seeing that

she was unobservant, rubbed himself along the chest of drawers, touched the chair near it, rubbed himself along the wall where Uncle Iwan's paper-patched glass portrait hung, passed the door, glanced at Gwen and quietly worked along the other wall until he reached the head of Gwen's bed—at one time his bed, too; and he asked himself, "And why not his then, in those days as in the past?" But kneeling down and getting on all fours, he suddenly disappeared.

Gwen looked about. He was not in sight. He was not behind the chest of drawers, he was not in the bed and she had not heard the room door opened. "Mark," she called.

" . . . . Yes?" came in muffled tones from under the valanced bed.

"What are you doing there, you rogue!"

"I'm—I'm looking for that—*I've* got it! I've found it!" and he came from under the bed with the sixpence between his teeth.

CHAPTER IV.

DREAMS REALIZED.

MARK once more returned home. He resumed a most absorbing correspondence with Auntie Gwen which lasted until, two years later, he got into a much busier office. After that he was so utterly wearied when he reached home from work, that when tea was over he usually sat gazing into the fire without uttering a word.

Now and then, however, his half-roused thoughts wandered through the red hollows to Ty-Cremed. In that delightful state he wrote hundreds of imaginary epistles and received hundreds of imaginary replies. Indeed, in this private correspondence by reverie, Gwen often acted as her own postman. He gazed

into the red hollows of the fire—and she came to him. He could see her roseate fresh face: the bright cheeks tapering to a dimpled chin, the aquiline nose, the restless ruddy lips curving into smiles and out of them again in playful talk; he could see her wavy chestnut hair about her forehead and down her temples to her ears half-peeping from their lairs of crowding, clustering, miniature curls; he could see those vivacious blue eyes of hers looking the very roguery that they tried to hide; he could even hear her low voice—a voice with a laugh in it—a voice with the tremour of affection in its deeper soundings of her heart; he could see and hear the past, and to be with even a mythical Gwen in the land of reverie, was bliss. But the sound of a foot or of a moved chair or of another's voice would touch this spirit and make it vanish: and Mark would awake to aching limbs and an intense impatience with his lot.

What, oh, what, was there in the secret inner life that he lived and told to nobody; what was there within that urged him to strike for liberty and to cast off the bondage and to throw in his lot, night and day and for ever, at Ty-Cremed?

He would not care if he was fagged to death for Auntie Gwen. And look at the rides and drives, the troutlets in the stream, the apples in the orchard and the loft, the nuts in the woods and hedges, the hot potatoes in cold butter-milk, the roaring wood fire in the bread-oven, the market day at Denbigh, the teas with pancakes at the farmhouses and the ideal afternoons on the big sofa in the big kitchen before a big bright fire—a sofa, a kitchen, and a fire, such as it was utterly impossible to find at any other place in the whole world.

With this dumb longing upon him he would go to bed early, but only to lie awake

thinking of the bed at Ty-Cremed, of the stars he used to see through the skylight, and of Gwen blotting them out by coming in with her candle to say "Good-night" on her way to bed. And wearied Mark would turn on his side and hug the clothes in memory of still earlier nights—the nights of his childhood—when Gwen used to fondle him and mingle with her subdued talk about God, Jesus, Angels, and Ghosts, ecstatic whispers about a darling, a pet, and a little sweetheart—whispers which she emphasised on his shoulder with her tightening arm and upon his cheek or brow with her seeking lips. Oh, dreams within dreams, how vividly they hovered about the wakeful side of sleep until at last slumber drew them in and made them still more vivid, still more real!

And yet Mark would waken to another day in the busy labyrinths of the Exchange; and what broker, what salesman, what apprentice,

I wonder, suspected Mark of carrying reveries as well as letters and invoices about those courts and alleys and up those stairs?

* * * * * * *

In the summer of one more eventful year, Mark for a swift holiday of from Saturday night until Sunday night had his dreams realized at Ty-Cremed.

Like a holiday on a meteor during its brief career down the heavens was the brief enchantment of that summer Sunday. The results were magical. His very ecstasies aged him. On the Saturday night, Mark was fifteen. On Sunday morning, when he was on his way to chapel with Gwen, he became twenty—nay, at the turn of the farm lane into the road when she brought him to bay in front of her, and re-tied his bow and stroked his hair back over his ears and then walked all the way to chapel with her arm through his, he came of age, there was something of the

man in him, joy was awake, rapture was alive, the book of Life was re-opened on that Sunday morning at the page of Love. 'Twas "Sweetheart Gwen" in very deed.

In the chapel he "looked on" with Gwen, even though he could not read a word of Welsh; but instead of reading, he leaned against her, and dreamed: not a dream, but a reality.

At dinner when he sat at one end of the table and Gwen at the other, he felt comparatively estranged even though Gwen, after carving the chicken at her end, went with his well-filled plate to his end to see that he had salt, and bread, and a glass of milk—to see him begin, in fact, before she sat to serve herself.

Felicity having changed what may be called her black religious gown after "Capel" for a half-secular second-best Sunday brown one, came to offer her services, but Gwen answer-

ed—"No, thank you, Felicity Robartch, we can manage very well by ourselves," and looked over the table to Mark with such a delightfully inclusive "Can't we?" that a colour came to Mark's cheek, which caused Felicity to crane her neck to see further round his face and to say—

"Why, he is blush his answer as red as Robin. And how did you like 'Capel' now that you are older, Mark? You play hypocrite there, whatever, you Lerpool rogue!—pretending Welsh aside your Auntie. *I* see you there! It was the smile of the whole place if you noticed, missis. . . . . He lose his tongue, I think, Auntie. Have you young gentleman? I thought so. Well, and no wonders," said Felicity, moving towards the back-kitchen at a sign from Gwen. "And he is to go from us to-night? Pity on him! He feel it. Pity he cannot take you with him, missis, for I 'sure you in 'Capel' he once seem to swallow you with his eyes."

"Felicity!" said Gwen.

"Truth for you," answered Felicity, and disappeared.

After dinner, Gwen and Mark sat together on the big sofa—her face supported by her hand, while the other hand played with Mark's hair as he sat on a buffet as near the sofa as he could get, for, alas, he was now too big to repeat history and get on.

They spoke about the old days, reminding each other of special events. Mark asked Gwen if she remembered the night when their bed-room window was splashed with gravel and when she tricked Elias Lewis; and Gwen withdrew her hand from Mark's ear, and rising, called Felicity to clear the dinner-table.

They then went arm-in-arm through the brilliant quiet sunshine to the stack-yard. Gwen selected a comfortable place in the shadow of a haystack and making a couch there, they sat amid the odour of hay and the

animated twitters of sparrows they had disturbed. But old Nelson, the Newfoundland, soon scented Gwen, and when in keeping with the heat and quiet of the Sunday afternoon he lazily sought Gwen's side, and settled down with his head on Gwen's lap, and monopolised her caresses, to Mark the dog became a rival. Mark tried to get his rival away by raising an alarm of "Cats!—Cats!"—but the dog gave Mark a long, slow, brown-eyed glance of disparagement, which made Gwen laugh in Nelson's favour, and Nelson wagged his tail among the hay and closed his eyes as if to close Mark completely outside of the private and confidential joy that existed between him and Gwen.

Nelson fell asleep, and Mark felt that he was more fully in possession of Gwen again. Her coveted attentions were not divided; and merely because she placed her hand on his knee and spoke encouragingly about his work

and about being industrious, good, and through all things faithful and honest, tears sprang through his premature manhood to his eyes: and Gwen, perceiving this, put her arm around his neck, and while his head rested upon her breast her cheek gently pressed the crown of his head, and caressingly moved to and fro to soothe the pain of his joy.

Gwen shortly transferred from her pocket to her lap some hazel-nuts. She cracked two of them with her own white teeth and gave them to Mark. But to Mark, just then, there was more sweetness even in the shell of one that he cracked for her than in the kernels she had given to him; but when Gwen bit off half of the kernel he gave to her and pressed the other half between his lips, why it had a most delicious flavour of her in it: and he wanted her arm about his neck again, her hand stroking his hair up from his brows again, her cheek caressing the crown of his

head, and he moved nearer by way of invitation. To his great joy it was accepted.

At Gwen's request he told her about his masters, and the ways of the Cotton business on 'Change. But he spoke with the forced warmth of one who has grown cold in a situation during the period of a month's notice to quit it. He confessed that he would rather, very much rather—live in Wales.

Gwen laughingly replied—"Nonsense!"

That hurt his very soul. He snatched up a straw of hay, chewed it into pulp, and completely forgetting himself, swallowed it. "But —I—would," he murmured.

"Really?" asked Gwen. "What an idea!"

"Really. I'd be happier. I'd work hard, I would, if I could come here. I'd do—anything!"

"But would your father and mother allow you?"

"If they only would; if they only would!"

he answered, and for the first time this visit, he voluntarily put his arm around her waist; and her hand met his and firmly held it to its bliss.

Was Sweetheart Gwen really more lovely than she used to be? he asked and re-asked himself in the sunshine and the hay. Was there really more endearment in the blue of her eyes and the tremour of her voice, or was he more subject to the spell? Had she verily more warmth in her veins or had he? or had both? for if only her hair touched his brow, his blood answered the tingling call, and set his cheeks and all his frame aflame.

After an almost sacred tea, Gwen and Mark went up-stairs and sat at her bed-room window. Their joint memories seemed to desire history to repeat itself, and influenced them to recall the past by place, thought, word, and deed.

Going to the chest of drawers Gwen asked Mark if he still collected foreign stamps.

Mark said, "A little; not like I used to do. Why? Do you collect? I'll give you all mine if you like."

Gwen did not answer, but tore the stamps off four envelopes, and gave them to him.

"One United States; one Canada, and two Australias," muttered Mark and asked Gwen if she could spare one of the old envelopes to put them in.

Again Gwen did not answer, but instead of giving an envelope she tore a piece of paper from that which lined her drawer and told him to put the stamps in that; and they moved to go down-stairs.

As they passed the wall on the left Mark was inclined to halt to view Uncle Iwan's glass portrait, but Gwen with the very gentlest of pressures upon his arm influenced him to pass it.

When they reached the door, however, Gwen, as if because she had passed the por-

trait in that avoiding way, returned to it and drew Mark with her. They stood looking up at it, Gwen muttering, "Dear, dear Iwan! God—bless him!" And suddenly she bent her head and turned away, weeping in her hands. Mark went to her and then she bent over him and sobbed on his shoulder. With a quick, impulsive, passionate breaking away from Mark, she resolutely returned to the drawer, took out the four envelopes from which the stamps had been torn, and, striking a match, burned the envelopes and their long letters one by one in the washhand basin.

"They are done with, now," she muttered watching the flickers. "You do not specially want to keep those stamps?" she asked Mark, and in a moment they were out of Mark's pocket and curling to destruction in the black ashes of paper.

"Do you know who sent them?" she enquired.

"No," answered Mark.

"He once gave you sixpence."

"Oh—him!"

"Yes. Ah, me! . . . . But come, Mark, my dear lad, your time is getting very short —the gig will soon come!—don't let us spend the last few minutes in the house, like this," she said going down-stairs and reaching a broad-brimmed straw hat from behind the staircase door.

Putting her arm through his she led him out and they strolled to the stack-yard gate where they leaned looking towards the rising moon and up to the increasing stars. The sudden sound of the horse being led from the stable sent Gwen's arm around Mark's neck and his quick arms around her waist. She bent and crooned a passionate throe of affection as she pressed him to her breast; and they moved to follow the gig to the door.

When Mark was on the gig with the driver,

Gwen mounted the iron step to say "Good-bye."

She, however, decided to continue standing on the gig step and keep Mark company down the farm lane as far as the main road, and say "Good-bye" there.

At the main road, Gwen said she would just go as far as "the forge" (the smithy)—it was a beautifully clear night and she would enjoy the walk back.

At "the forge" the driver pulled up, but Gwen said, "Make room, Mark—I will come all the way!" She took Mark's seat and he stood leaning upon her, with her arm about him and his face against hers; and the deep double kiss that she gave him he has in his lips to this day.

* * * * * * * *

Two months after that moonlight drive, when Mark reached home one night, there was the strangest news in all the world for

him. Auntie Gwen had disappeared; she had left the farm. Some said to America, some to Australia, some to New Zealand; nobody really knew where. She had gone, and without a word for a soul—not even for him.

END OF PART II.

PART III.

A FINAL CONFESSION.

I AM now like a guilty biographer brought to bay—to autobiographical bay, for Mark is no other than the boy I used to be. Nor has that boy Mark ceased to exist. He is still living within me with his special knowledge of Ty-Cremed and Sweetheart Gwen. He haunts me, and not like a conventional ghost, outside, but within. He is as faithful as my shadow. More faithful. He follows where shadows cannot follow—he follows me in the dark, he follows me into sleep, into dreams, and sometimes wakens me out of them to twit me with being a man—and a bachelor—and not in love.

This is cruel of him, in view of the facts; very cruel, considering that in this respect I

am only what he made me at Ty-Cremed, and it is very hard for me, who never stayed there, to be taunted with the results of his amorous visits. He ought to remember first causes. *He* began it. It was he who told me all about Sweetheart Gwen. I, Markham, the man, never saw her in my life. I only know of her as of a dream. And I love and cherish that dream with an indwelling consciousness of Destiny, the result of his own fidelity: so he should not twit me. We are both in the same Fate. If he has not met with his ideal Gwen in latter years, no more have I. If I cannot summon Sweetheart Gwen from modern Wales, the moonlights and the stars, for him, he cannot do so for me; if he is lonely in farm kitchens, dairies, orchards, and stack-yards of the mind, so am I. But there!—I do not wish to pick a family quarrel with him, and especially over his ideal and mine, dear Sweetheart Gwen.

* * * * * * *

But he really does play the strangest pranks with me. I assure you that at certain periods I have to live his life more than I live my own. I might as well try to stop five spots of rain with four fingers as try to stop Mark's ideas acting upon mine. It sounds ridiculous, I know ; but there the despotism is. He, a boy, has the power of influencing my Present, but I, a man, am powerless to influence his Past. I am aging—I feel it—but he is irrevocably young, a perennial youth with the most conservative amatory emotions. True, he allows me a little latitude with my thoughts ; but hardly any with my feelings. I have often tried to educate him up to a more contemporaneous kind of interest in people and things, and especially in the opposite sex, but in vain. He resists me, he is successful at it, then he dominates over both thought and feeling, and I find myself idly thinking of the past, when

I ought to be active in the present. He takes me into the country when to all appearances I am in town; he transports me to the Vale of Clywd, even when I am on 'Change with every outward indication that I am standing there ready to strike the best bargain I can for Wigley Bentham & Co.

I often ask myself, What have I to do with Mark at twelve and fifteen, and what has he to do with me at thirty-five? He takes life sweetly, as if the World and everything on it were young, as if Love were indeed a Cupid, and Death very much too far off to be understood. On the other hand, I am now inclined to think of the age of things, and especially of the age of myself, and to now and then dream of the future. But he will not let me.

Nor is any time or place sacred to him. I may be in a quiet corner of the Liverpool Exchange News Room, reading for business purposes, the state of "Manchester Shirtings"

—nevertheless, he comes buzzing and bobbing inside the cells of my brain like an internal, eternal, infernal fly. He wants to take me to certain sunbeams stored slantwards in the memory from a certain day in North Wales; and, if only for two moments, between one price and another, I go. Candidly, I like the aerial trip; and I read the next quotation with quite a feeling of fresh Welsh air.

Take another case. I may be on the verge of forming an estimate of the market value of some long-stapled Egyptian, drawn out between my fore-fingers and thumbs—lo, in the minutest miniature, as if he had leapt out of my finger-ends, he dances upon the shining silken tight-rope that I hold, and for a moment—a mere instant—the cotton staple is not cream-coloured, but russet gold, the colour and gleam of the hair of Sweetheart Gwen.

At other times, I cannot go up certain first

floors or along certain ground floors, it may be to secure two hundred bales of Surats before the lot is sold, without he button-holes me, from within, to recall some hand-rail escapade suggestive of the monkey on the stick. Does it matter to him if the lot is sold? Not at all, and for his own amusement he almost induces me to slide astride down the hand-rail in memory of good old times. If I turn into Brown's Buildings I am booked for quite a series of reminiscences—from the top floor where his "first office" is, to the basement where the morning heap of office sweepings lies. Let him but catch the dank dusty odour of that heap and he tells me how he used to go moling in it for envelopes with foreign stamps on. For his satisfaetion, even in these days I am tempted to go down there for the fascination of finding a rare "India" or "Ceylon."

In another direction I am simply victimized. I am continually buying roasted chestnuts and

new season's wallnuts. I am quite sure that *I* could do without them, but I have a palate within a palate, and the inner one is Mark's. The sight of the black spark-lit chestnut husks or a waft of their aromatic fumes sets his yearning palate to act upon mine—and there is no harmony of tastes between us until I have bought him his old, old pennyworth. Fellow salesmen ask me how I can consume so many, but of course I cannot explain that I am only a kind of cage for an omnivorous monkey with a weakness that way. I have to bear their remarks and smile. Mark hears them and laughs.

Very frequently has that laugh of his committed me to an awkward situation. I have, for example, stood at an Exchange luncheon bar along with other members of the staple—I have stood there eating my shrimp and lobster sandwich of little more cubic and superficial measurement than a lady's visiting card,

when Mark quite suddenly would contrast that effeminate sandwich with the masculine slabs of bread and butter of *his* period, and deride my acquired daintiness with a chuckle that would partly succeed in escaping through my mastication. "What are you laughing at, Brockleton?" a friend will ask. "At me?" "Or at me?" "Or *me*?" one or two will playfully enquire. But what can I say? I cannot tell them that I am possessed—of a devil; or that I am haunted, that I am a man with the ghost of a boy on the spiral staircase of my being. I have to hook on my laugh at the most convenient bit of humour about. Sometimes there is no humour to hook on to. Then I have to invent some. And with what result? I now have an exacting reputation of seeing the grotesque side of things.

Mark has another vagary. He likes to trap me into conversation with, say a railway passenger, when I do not desire or intend it; and

he has a very sly way of bringing it about. Though the train is going at the rate of fifty miles an hour, he has a persistent habit of using my eyes to look at the fields, woods, and farmsteads. It is useless to protest. Even if I turn my face from the window, he insists upon having his full allowance of landscape—even though he has to take the rest out in reverie. Indeed, if I will not turn to the fields, he turns the fields to me. He passes landscape slides into the lantern of my mind, and behold, as if by truly magic lantern, up come the most pleasant associations from the past. I grow to like the effects. I give myself up to them. They act upon my feelings —so much so that I again look through the carriage window and impulsively say to my fellow passenger, "The country looks splendid! That's a fine crop of oats they are cutting out there. It takes me back to when I was a boy in Wales."

The passenger looks at me as if that is suspiciously familiar for a beginning, and leaves me to fight out the stranded impulse with Mark.

* * * * * * *

But in nothing is Mark so despotic as in our joint dealings with the opposite sex. In a certain mood of envious discontent that sometimes comes over him, he frantically desires those unrestrained caresses which young women bestow upon boys but studiously withhold from men. I have tried to convey to him the view of Society upon the point, but it is useless; he pays no attention; he tries to act upon his impulse as against my common sense, and I have felt him so jealous of a kissed and cuddled boy, that I have thought he would jump clean out of my skin and demand his rights, or take them.

When he is in this mood and longs for the old freedom that he had at Ty-Cremed, it is

absolutely dangerous to take him into company. In violent remembrance of his delightful freedom with responsive beauty then, he protests against the decorous inactivity of my manhood, now, and thrusts his short arms as far as he can into my longer ones as if he would have both of us conjointly embrace some lovely creature in bigamous memory of some one else. It's a fact. He has sometimes so worked upon my feelings at the sight of a lady lounging on a couch with her arms supporting her head and her eyes courting confidences, that it has been the greatest struggle to keep my arms in good behaviour or my speech from emotional nonsense. On a few rare occasions he has so mesmerised me with his reveries that I have fallen into a kind of trance—I have surrendered to the eyes—and I have confided. Confided what, forsooth? The fact that—that—I was sometimes haunted by an intense wish that I were

a boy again! And with what result? Why, that I have been wakened from the mesmeric state by the laugh of the coquette. She has looked at me as if I were not mature, and has encouraged the attentions of a neighbouring suit of clothes which, to all appearances, had a fully evolved man in it.

But how could I fully explain to her? I should only be smiled at the more. The secret difficulty with me is, to keep in check a pertinacious lad who has the most whimsical patriotism on the question of love. I assure you it is most awkward. He jeers me if I am reserved; and he balks me if I am familiar. If I stand aloof from womanhood in bacheloric resignation to a lonely fate, he frets, he demands his rights. On the other hand, if in momentary forgetfulness of him and his, I even turn over the Marriage Service with prospective dreams on my own account, he protests; and if I cultivate a platonic friend-

ship where there is the slightest risk of it ripening into something else, he gets into such a passion that he, from the inside, actually smacks my face with my own conscience—smacks it until the platonic friend, with quite an erroneous notion, twinklingly enquires, "What makes you blush so, Mr. Brockleton?"

If, at the highly susceptible age of twenty-one, I looked rather admiringly at, say, my friend Bouverie's sister (which sometimes happened) Mark would internally growl—"Now then! Eyes off!" and deal my heart a thump that made it palpitate. Even when (should I confess it?), even when I have quite consciously utilised some very beautiful creature as nothing else but living, smiling, conversing memoranda by which my reveries could the more vividly lead their way to Sweetheart Gwen, Mark has been jealous, and has tried to give the creature a moment's notice to quit the illegal tenancy of my eyes.

He has shadowed my speech, too, like a detective. Bouverie used to give me rather emphatic helps, hints, and illustrations, to call his sister by her Christian name. Once I ventured—I actually called her Florrie—mercy! Mark almost choked me with the delicious morsel, and I was not free from a feeling of suffocation until I restored internal peace by returning to my customary use of "Miss." Bouverie looked daggers, Florrie looked as if I had removed out of her immediate neighbourhood; but Mark performed an exultant leap and congratulated me upon a narrow escape from, I understood him to mean, Bouverie's deep designs.

Even at Christmas time, when, once a year, by virtue of the mistletoe, my cooped impulses had a certain liberty, he could not leave me alone. Just when I had seized both the opportunity and, say, Bouverie's sister, Mark with Sweetheart Gwen as a spectral ally, would

seem to place along my lips a phantom slip of non-conducting kiss-proof tissue paper—that was the sensation—and with what befooling, unsatisfying results those experienced will know. What Bouverie's sister thought of the results I am not aware; but I used to think that she (and Bouverie as well) was exceedingly ecstatic about very little. *I* felt no thrill. I was greatly disappointed. Indeed, it is a fact, and a very trying fact, that since the deep double kiss which Mark received during the farewell drive that Sunday night—a rapturous caress which has come down to *me* more like a tradition or an incident of romance—I, Markham Brockleton, have not experienced one solitary caress of like character either in quantity or quality—not one!—and I attribute the fact to the interference of Mark and the approval of that interference by Swee— . . . . No; I will not complain; I will not blame. After all, this old feeling of

discontent has, waned. To recall it seems like giving the ancient history of my younger young manhood, when love wanted some tangible response to its call; when, not having Mark's and my own ideal to kiss, I hazarded a kiss with reality: and, alas, sank away from the contact; disappointed, dejected, preferring Mark's reiterated account of his ecstatic experience in the past.

It was during this period that I made an amatory mistake. How I came to so miscalculate my sensations, I cannot say. How, with such a watchful authority as Mark within me, I was allowed to mistake the symptoms, is a mystery. However, I did mistake them. I thought I had fallen in love. For some inexplicable reason—unless, indeed, they did so to prove to me the futility of my own quest—both Mark . . . . and Sweetheart Gwen . . . . allowed me to enjoy the illusion. It led me to believe that at last their spell

over me was at an end, and that I was free.

The other victim of the illusion was a very rosebud of a being: as bright as morning and as warm as noon. Her name was even *Gwen*doline, she was even a daughter of Wales, she even had blue eyes, and they lured me like distant dells when the hyacinth blooms. For two weeks I was all worship. It was not the month of February, but I sent her a Valentine —a present—and for three days in the third week I looked in a certain jeweller's window every morning and evening as I passed, to see if a certain engagement ring was still unsold. What held me from entering that shop on the fourth day of that third week? I often wonder, but I feel solemnly grateful that some invisible hand of Providence did hold me; and how very thankful I am, for her sake as well as my own, that I never really proposed. It was more like a private proposal to myself

that I *should* propose; but something told me, and tells me yet, that the idea was a mistake. But, poor gentle soul, she did hear me say that I loved her; and the very instant that I said it, I knew for the first time that I did not! It seemed as if the words dispelled the illusion and restored my vision, for when I looked at her face again, smiling though it was, it did not make the same appeal to me or hold the same sway over me; it was not quite so beautiful, not so winning; and compared with a face which Mark called from afar just then, it became as blank to me as a sandy beach that has no sun-lit pools with the blue sky in them. She had not the electric power of love over me, after all.

I said "Good-night" to her as though I were going direct to the scaffold, and if I think of the incident I feel as if I am still being hanged for it, though as far as I can tell I am in no way responsible. I did not fully ex-

plain to her. How could I? Her friends, so I hear, even yet think that I trifled with her. But she does not. Nor did I trifle with her. By no means. Up to the moment in which I spoke I was sincere. The hard condition was that I had to be sincere after, as well.

I was twenty-two when that happened, and much has occurred since then. I have what the world calls "got on." My goods and chattels and the balance at the bank have increased, and yet I live in that state in which, according to a high authority, it is not good for a man to live. But *I* live alone simply because my old friend Bouverie, who used to share apartments with me, is married—and with the usual result: he has joined the ranks of Providence's agents in advance to preach the blessings of matrimony to the unblessed souls who are single. I rarely go to his pretty little house but what, in the presence of his wife, he gives me a connubial punch in the

very place, I am sure, where the rib of Adam was taken away whereof to make Eve, and ridicules me for not entering Paradise and making a little garden of Eden of my own. His wife (nursing their third baby) abets the assault and aids the ridicule.

She playfully asks if I will put myself in her experienced hands—and for an instant she poises her head, and turns up her eyes, and smiles exactly in the manner of her pretty cousin Jess. As an answer to that I take up their eldest little girl—my god-child—hide my face between her face and shoulder and tell Mr. and Mrs. Bouverie that it is of no use experimenting with me, for I am a hopeless case ; but they only laugh their disbelief of any such thing—and Jess comes in to supper.

Sometimes Mr. and Mrs. Bouverie give parties. I am invited. I go. I pass through all the stages of enjoyment, and even dance ; but I wonder what my partners would say if

I told them that I dance under false pretences, that I do not dance for dancing's sake, or for their sakes, but that my arm with set purpose deliberately uses their maidenly waists as material mediums—bodily mediums if you like—to recall the delights of embracing some one who has long since become spiritual to me. Yes, I wonder what they would say; but frankly it is only on this understanding that I can dance with any comfort of conscience at all.

After a few dances my hostess is markedly kind to me. I cannot help but note that she sits chatting with me longer and more confidentially than with others; that she somewhat specially orders the maid to bring the coffee my way; and that she leaves me to be affable with her pretty cousin Jess. I—I—*am* affable, but oh! knowing what I do know I feel sly, insincere, almost mean, and am grieved that I cannot—that I dare not. I behold

beautiful gentle Jess as something pathetically unaware of how far she stands outside the lines of my destiny. My thoughts travel, my feelings wander, I lose grip of my topic; I feel myself forcing the conversation with artificial vigour, and yet am helpless. I am as if under a ban; Jess's eyes wander; her smiles flag; she uses her fan, she says "Yes," and "No," and "Indeed?" as if in struggling soliloquy; she is confused, annoyed; and yet she gracefully begs to be excused as she desires to speak to her friend Maud, who is leaving the room. She goes. I rise and lean against the mantel-piece studying a water-colour drawing which I have often studied under similar circumstances before, or I look at the nearest album of views which I have looked at until the photographs seem to possess eyes and look at me, or I stroll out upon their little terrace and walk beneath the stars, a social failure.

When I see Jess again, her cheeks smile, but her lips and eyes do not, and I know that she knows that it is not to be.

Bouverie's sister Florrie is also married, now, and to a very nice fellow, too. Following Bouverie's example and as if to get me as near the delights of paternity as they can, they also have made me a god-father—god-father to their son and heir; and to complicate matters as far as I am concerned, they have called him Mark.

Mr. and Mrs. Brooks (Florrie's new name) also give parties; parties with a purpose. Indeed—if I may say so of friends of whom I am very fond—between these two pairs of happy couples I have a very hard time of it. They not only try to playfully ridicule me into bliss, but they try to supper and dance me into it, and they continually speak as if I am hourly missing something ecstatic; as if I am momentarily deprived of incommunicable

raptures; as if they knew certain entrancing secrets of life which I shall never know unless I go the one sure way to find them.

It is strange; very strange. They are married; I am not, and they speak as if I can help it. I cannot, and be true to impressions which I am not responsible for having. Whether they can understand it or not, my state is as inevitable for me as theirs is for them. I cannot revoke my past. I feel as if a long, long time ago and in other scenes I had been affianced in anticipation, and by proxy—by Mark. Men like Bouverie, household men, domesticated men, men with the lady's easy chair filled and with more pairs of feet on the hearthrug than their own, may call out "Nonsense!" "Childish!" "Sentimental!" But do not judge rashly. One nature cannot always fully know the possibilities of another; and especially in the mystery of love.

I speak sincerely when I say that the far-off spell under which I live is not nonsense, nor is it childish, nor yet sentimental; nor is it an influence within the power of my own control. To try and rule these old emotions as out of date, is like trying to rule the ancient stars of heaven out of their modern spheres. I can no more rid myself of Sweetheart Gwen by looking upon another being, than a marigold can change its colour by looking upon a rose. I cannot dethrone her. She rules —the imperial empress of all the visible and invisible world of love. She comes —and in coming makes me ineligible for another.

Whatever the local conditions may be, she can admit herself into my presence. No servants, hosts, or guests, can shut her out. However crowded the room or table there is always room for her: and between me and the next lady. She is never

invited with me, but she does not stand on ceremony, she is no slave to formalities; if I go she is sure to be there to meet me. Nor is she subject to material conditions. If all the doors are closed, she comes through the walls; sometimes through a picture—landscape or portrait—sometimes through a song or sonata; and sometimes even through the eyes of a lady I see, or on the tone of the voice of another with whom I am conversing.

Sometimes I feel as though she had never existed in the flesh: only as a paragon in the dreamy distances of the mind. At other times she is so vivid that the sensation is reversed: she it is who lives, and I am only like a thought thinking itself towards her, nearer and nearer, and when the thought approaches so closely that it calls me to the life of the flesh again, I have a longing to journey somewhere—anywhere—everywhere—in search of

a completeness of life in a life precisely like hers.

Thus am I ruled—over-ruled—and I would not have it otherwise. It is an exquisite thraldom of the soul, and the very angels of Heaven seem to witness it and send greetings of encouragement, and the most delightful earthly aids to be faithful. The mere names of "Gwen" and "Wales" are secret calls. Whatever I am thinking or doing, at the sight or sound of them I halt and yield my thoughts, like souls at the sound of the *Ave Maria.* The word "Madam," used in any sense whatever, brings to my spirit the sound of a pet mare's hoofs with beauteous Gwen upon its back. The lowing of cattle at twilight gives me an urgent yearning to be wooed and won precisely as of yore ; every sweetbriar is imbued with the odour of her spirit to link the thoughts, the feelings, the very passions molten with love, in an unalterable fidelity to their

source. All caresses are only performed symbols of her caresses; all kisses the mere similes of hers. All love songs are vague abstractions unless I think of her. Think of her and every expression strikes home to the home of warmth and gives verve to the imprisoned passion that is faithful and true, and believes and waits.

"What does it all mean?" I ask of my very fidelity. Has my individual nature, has Nature as a whole, some clear purpose in view which I cannot yet see, and in which I am nevertheless to have faith? Is there a land of promise, a time of promise, where and when this far-off beginning of Love shall be resumed and perfected? For love longs in me—longs as I fancy migrating birds must long when at sea they behold a mirage of meadow which they come to discover is not land, but a dream-like presage of it, and then sing forward on hopeful wing. Is Memory a mirage? Am I

to go forward into Life until I set foot on the fully-realised fair land where the fair ideal awaits me with the beauty that was Sweetheart Gwen's, and the rapturous love that was hers and mine?

Mark tells me that I must.

THE END.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "SWEETHEART GWEN."

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"For what Mr. Tirebuck, in the exercise of his splendid faculty, has given us, we can only be truly grateful. Dorrie Holt is a study in the feminine that, by its delicacy, its sincerity, and its daring, must move the admiration of every one with an eye to fine literature. . . . . Alack! here I am nearly at the end of my allotted space, and I have not said one-quarter of what was in my mind to write when I first began to write. I meant to give you some idea of Mr. Tirebuck's manner in the comic vein, which is excellent; of his fine handling of simile and metaphor, and his brilliant analysis of thought and motive, of his remarkable powers of minute and vivid description. For the mere literary style of this striking book I have nothing but unqualified praise."—"MODUS" in *Wit and Wisdom.*

"We are glad to welcome 'Dorrie' from the hand which gave us 'St. Margaret,' and which will, we hope, give us many more girl-portraits, for Mr. Tirebuck is particularly happy in his delineation of women. The ever present shadow of a great sin gives a touch of Greek tragedy of restless fate to the story."—*Surrey Advertiser.*

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"I have seldom read such graphic and powerful description. Dorrie herself is a wonderful study. A book full of power and passion, and worth hundreds of the milk-and-water stuff which many people read."—*Quiz.*

"She (Dorrie) seems to myself the most absolutely original, and, in her way, the most taking figure in recent fiction. She is unique. To one reader at least she remains among the friends of fiction, the beloved of dreams."—ANDREW LANG, *At the Sign of the Ship.*

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